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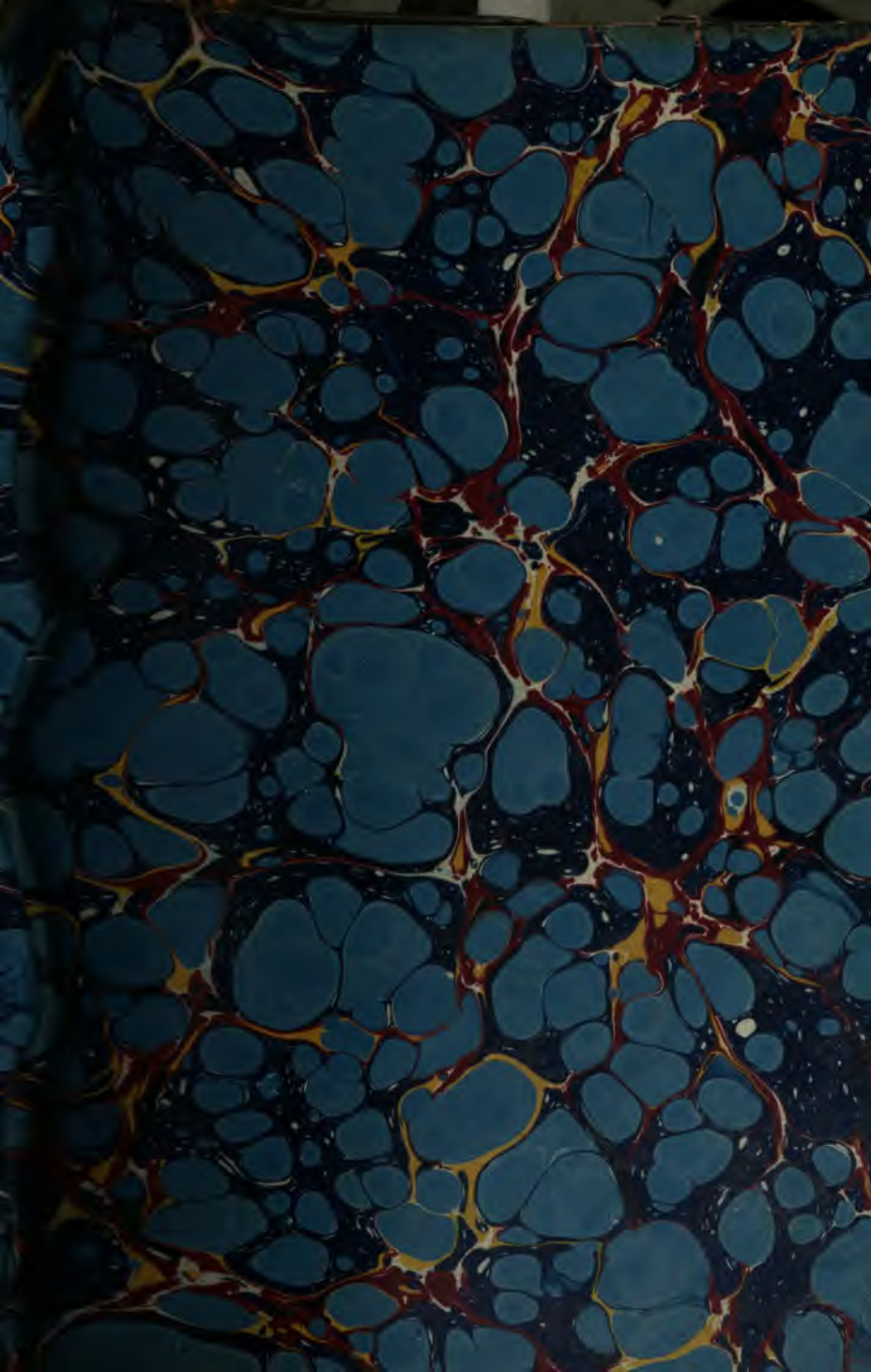

SHOOTING, YACHTING, AND SEA-FISHING TRIPS.

SECOND SERIES.

SHOOTING, YACHTING,

AND SEA-FISHING TRIPS,

AT HOME AND ON THE CONTINENT.

SECOND SERIES.

BY

"WILDFOWLER," "SNAPSHOT,"

In Two Volumes.

VOL. I.

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INTRODUCTION.

MY former books, "Shooting and Fishing Trips in England, France, Alsace, Belgium, Holland, and Bavaria," having met with a most flattering reception at the hands of the Press and of the Sporting Public, and many correspondents having written to ask for the continuation of my trips, I am most happy to comply with their wishes.

The contents of the present work first appeared, in the form of articles, in the following journals, viz.: *Bell's Life in London, The Country, The Sporting Gazette, The Irish Sportsman, The Live Stock Journal and Fanciers' Gazette*; and whilst thus acknowledging the channels through which I originally introduced my lucubrations to the Public, it behoves me—and is, to me, a sincere pleasure—to tender my heartiest thanks to the Proprietors and to the Editors of those papers for their great kindness to me.

In conclusion, I trust my readers will extend to this new series the patronage they have so liberally bestowed on the first; and I hope the Reviewers, who have unanimously treated my "Shooting and Fishing Trips" so good-naturedly, will look upon the present new volumes with equal favour. I have to thank them for, and have taken heed of, their wholesome criticisms, in the hope that they may now find still more praise to bestow on my new venture than they did on the last—and they were most gracious to me then.

THE AUTHOR.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

SHOOTING EXCURSIONS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	"Glorious Twelfth," 1876	3
II.	Snipe-Shooting in Ireland	12
III.	The "First"	21
IV.	Rabbiting in Downs	31
V.	Redleg-Shooting in Norfolk	41
VI.	Shore-Shooting from Purfleet to Tilbury	52
VII.	Pheasant-Shooting in Surrey	62
VIII.	The Western Shore of Canvey Island	72
IX.	The Eastern Shore of Canvey Island	79
X.	Seasonable Sport after "the Season"	88
XI.	A By-Day at the Nore	100
XII.	A Wildfowl-Shooting Expedition near Southend	108

HINTS AND REMARKS ON SHOOTING.

XIII.	Facts about Pigeon-Shooting	117
XIV.	Shooting at Random	128
XV.	The Brotherhood of Sport	138
XVI.	In a Stalking-Horse	143

CHAP. PAGE
XVII.—Grouse-Driving as a Sport 147
XVIII.—Bog-Trotting 153
XIX.—Dogs for Bog-Trotting 160
XX.—A Word about Retrievers 166
XXI.—New System for Judging at Field-Trials . . 174
XXII.—Vermin versus Game 182
XXIII.—Redlegs 187
XXIV.—Practical Hints on Shooting 192
XXV. „ „ „ *Continued* . . . 201
XXVI. „ „ „ „ . . . 208
XXVII.—The Philosophy of Shooting 215
XXVIII.—Sportsmen we all have known 223
XXIX. „ „ „ *Continued* . . . 231

SHOOTING ON THE CONTINENT.

XXX.—Continental Sportsmen, Breakers, and Poachers . 241
XXXI. „ „ „ „ *Continued* 251
XXXII.—Free Shootings on the Continent 262
XXXIII. „ „ „ *Continued* . . 271
XXXIV.—Duck-Decoying in France 285
XXXV.—Shooting in France 289

SHOOTING EXCURSIONS.

13

SHOOTING EXCURSIONS.

CHAPTER I.

"GLORIOUS TWELFTH," 1876.

IT is rather earlier than I like, when the knock comes at my bedroom door, and when, in answer to my startled "All right!" comes the information that "the master is up and getting ready, and breakfast is waiting."

"Surely," I dreamily reason to myself, "it cannot possibly be time to rise;" but I get up and go to the nearest window, and I see that the heavens are already getting of a very pale blue overhead, and in the east a faint light seems to radiate through the morning mist at the horizon.

This settles the question, and mental visions of lots of birds, literally swarming among the heather, reconcile me thoroughly with the absolute necessity of leaving my cosy bed for the day's sport.

Presently, whilst I am in the tub, I hear a neighbouring bedroom door being noisily opened, and young Ken, forthwith, is vehemently calling out my name. So I open

my door, and look out to see what he wants, and I find him grinning with delight from ear to ear.

"Is not it a beautiful morning, ah, old boy?" he exclaims; "we will have a glorious day of it, mark my words."

Yes, everything promised well, but I said I dreaded the heat, which we were sure to experience over the moor, with no shelter of any sort until we retraced our footsteps towards the glen. And thus we are exchanging our remarks, standing in the passage, almost naked, and violently towelling our respective bodies, when someone else turns up from upstairs; and as it turns out to be the old housekeeper, we did not wish to shock *sa vertu*, and, accordingly, we precipitately retreated to our respective "nests," where we hastily donned our shooting gear and then went together downstairs.

We met the Squire in the yard; he was bareheaded, and was discussing with Sam, the keeper, the probabilities of our sport.

"By Jove!" said he to me, "we will have it hot to-day, I can tell you. I don't remember having experienced such hot weather as we did yesterday and the three preceding days since the year 1840 'something or other;' and Sam, who is a regular weather-prophet, says that to day will be as bad as anything we have as yet experienced."

"Well," I rejoined, "we are in for it, and since one must 'suffer to be happy,' let us make up our minds to be well roasted to-day, that's all."

And we went in to breakfast. Mrs. Ashton, the housekeeper, had prepared everything right royally for our spread, and we did honour to it. Whilst thus engaged Sam came in to say that the men had just arrived, and the Squire forthwith ordered something to be sent them.

Finally, just when the heavens were getting radiantly illumined by the already ardent beams of the sun, we marched off, Ken and I leading the way with our guns already loaded, eager for the fray. The Squire came next, with Sam, who was carrying his master's gun, and we crossed the primitive bridge over the stream and began the ascent. As we were beginning the climbing, the thought struck me that we might find a rabbit or two on our way, and that would considerably enliven the process, and I did, indeed, fire once at a bunny; but the light had not yet got well into the glen, and I therefore missed him in the most delightful manner.

At last we stood on the brow, and there we stopped and waited for the rear.

"Now, Sam," said the Squire, "there is but little wind blowing, and that comes seawards, and therefore pretty right for us as we now stand; I think we may begin here."

Sam then gave him up the gun, into which my host deliberately shoved the two first cartridges of the season, and, at a signal from him, the brace of pointers were let go, much to the discomfiture of the setters, who struggled desperately to be let loose too, and who started together with such startling unanimity as to almost pull the lad that was holding them down on his face.

Meanwhile the old dog, Bang, had taken his sweep to the left, and had gone almost out of sight. Ken thereupon inquired of Sam if it would not be desirable to keep him a little more steady; but Sam, with conscious pride, remarked that Bang could be trusted, and this my host confirmed with a knowing nod.

"Jess is on point, at any rate," quoth Ken, who had the right wing.

"And so is Bang," I rejoined.

"Well, you both go to the points," said my host, "and I will take my chance where I may happen to be walking."

But we would not hear of it, and insisted upon his coming too.

"Well, you see," he went on, "I am not so young as I once was, and I know you are both impatiently longing to have a crack, so it would be better for you to go on 'your own hook,' rather than wait for my slow progression."

But this was all nonsense. The "old man," as Ken somewhat irreverently, but with great fondness, calls his father, got on as well as we did, and we got to Bang's point with very little delay, Bang was in a half-circle, his chest heaving tremendously, and his great brown eyes turning slowly from us to the point where his nose told him that the birds were. He never moved, and as Sam trains his dogs to remain on point, and does not induce them to go on when the guns come up to them, we had to pass him. The moment we did so, he turned himself straight, and became as rigid as a marble statue, and up went the lot—nine, all told. The "old 'un," as Sam called the cock, went on a port tack, and I sent him a Schultze dose that pitched him toes over head, like a heap of rags, into a tuft of heather. With my second I settled a "towerer," who meant going to the moon seemingly; and the Squire thereupon remarked that we had begun well. He had a brace to his account, and Ken had had a clean kill with his first, and had originally hit the towerer with his second.

The Squire then took one of the birds he had shot, and, calling Bang, placed the grouse near his muzzle. The old dog was as pleased as Punch, licked the bird carefully, buried his nose once or twice in its warm feathers, and looked unutterably grateful things.

This done, at a move of the governor's hand, he went on again, and we stalked towards the bitch.

Bang, however, was hardly started on his journey when, going up a knoll, he caught sight of his mate, and down he went, a most beautiful back at some hundred yards' range.

A lovely thing it was to see performed, and I felt I could have hugged the old dog round the neck, for the treat he had given us. The pack over Jess proved to be smaller than the first by one bird, and we again got five birds out of it. This time the odd bird belonged to me. I had fired at it as soon as it had risen, and the short range had proved a tickler for my Tolley modified choke-bore, for I missed as clean as could be. Fortunately, however, I had no smoke bothering me, as the Schultze powder produces but very little, so that I was enabled, at once, to place efficiently my second barrel. Now grouse are flying uncommonly fast and strong this year, so that, although the interval between the two shots was necessarily of a very short nature, yet my escaping bird was fully sixty odd yards off when I cut it down. This was my first long shot, and immediately after I had occasion for a second, as a single cock rose a long way off, just as I was closing the gun, and the Squire's words were still on his lips :

"Don't fire. Too far!" when I pulled trigger, and, to my immense satisfaction, and to the Squire's astonishment, I floored the bird.

"You are still good at that sort of game, then? Your hand," said he, "though so much at work with the pen, has lost none of its cunning with the gun."

"Give praise where it is due," I rejoined, laughing; "the gun is a good one, and the cartridges kill well; the rest is merely habit."

"True, true," said he; "but let me try one or two of those loads of yours."

I handed him a dozen, remarking that one or two would be no criterion of any cartridges, as at first starting one might miss, and then lay the blame on them.

Subsequently he appreciated them so very highly that he declared his intention to use no other.

At this stage of our proceedings, although it was only 7.30 or 8 A.M., the heat began to be felt by all of us. The cool air of the night had vanished. The mists of the valley were gone, and the heather already began to steam—*i.e.* above it, for a foot or two, a thick cloud of hot air seemed to dance all over the moor—and that promised badly for scent and for subsequent sport. Indeed, we managed tolerably well as regards the latter, but the former, in due time, became wofully deficient, and the dogs, setters, and pointers by noon were quite done, both in limb and in nose, in spite of water being given them to drink, and some being thrown over them. In fact, I do not remember ever having experienced such heat on the moors on any "twelfth" within my recollection, and that extends to some fourteen or fifteen years. It was simply awful. We took off every part of our clothing that could possibly be dispensed with, and yet we were literally melting.

As for dry walking, why, this was quite a new feature after last year's floods.

Why, the previous year, before we had been a quarter of an hour on the moor, our waterproof boots were thoroughly filled with water, and all day we went on as though snipe-shooting rather than grouse-shooting. But, now, what a change had come over the scene! It was like walking on a thick and well-matted carpet, and very pleasant it

would have been but for the hot weather. Howbeit the bloom on the heather would have done any artist's heart good to behold, and the ever-changing aspect of the light thrown thereon, as the sun by turns brightened some places, and then threw them into comparative gloom by hiding his blazing face behind a fleeting cloud, was something to be beheld in order to be appreciated.

Our men, however, cared but little for that sort of thing, and, really, one could not help pitying them. There they were, four of them, literally groaning under the weight of our game and the heat of the sun, and yet they looked vastly interested whenever game turned up. Now, it is an astonishing thing what a difference it makes in a game-bearer's countenance and step when the shooters are tramping on, nothing being on the *tapis* for the time being, and when, all of a sudden, either a shot turns up, or else the dogs are seen to fall on point. The game-bearers trudge along, in the first case, as though they fully realised that they "shall earn their daily bread" by the sweat of their brows, and did not relish the process; but the moment a point is enthusiastically pointed out, they put up their heads, their eyes sparkle, their blood is up, and fifty grouse on each of their backs could not prevent them from walking boldly upright, as though proud of their burdens.

Yes, there is a something in the gun which acts like a magic wand with all sporting natures, and beaters, keepers, game-bearers, and shooters all feel bound together, for the time being, in the pursuit of sport, because they share alike in its exciting incidents. We had, as usual, a few "sensations" during the day. First an unlucky rabbit (possessed of an evil spirit, surely) chooses to run the gauntlet of the three of us, and, *mirabile dictu!* he escaped. How he did it is to us a mystery, but he did. And it happened in this

wise: Bunny started from Ken's right, and came past him. Bang! Bang!

"Oh, Ken!" exclaimed the father, "what a duffer you must be!" and *he* also bang-banged with the same result.

"The devil!" he exclaimed ruefully, whilst the rabbit came my way, and, to be candid, it was an easy shot, but I was laughing so immoderately at the queer faces of my two friends, that I fired almost without attempting to kill, and of course missed him too. Sam's face was a study then. The next bit of fun was at golden plovers. We were walking on in a line, and the setters then were at work, when I saw a small gray cloud rapidly flying over the moor, and I called out, "Plovers!" when we all stopped, and they passed right over us. Our six barrels floored about a score, and two wounded ones were followed and picked up by the under-keeper.

The heat was then so terrific that it was impossible to remain walking any longer, unless we had wished to court a sunstroke, or something equally unpleasant. We therefore turned to the right-about, and leisurely came back to the house. After luncheon, I went to my bedroom, lay on the bed, and went off to sleep.

At 3 o'clock we started anew, but the heat, if anything, had increased, and it will therefore be readily imagined that the "fagging" was of a most delightful kind.

Howbeit, when we stopped work, somewhere near 8 o'clock, we were a tremendous long way from the house, and, owing to the scent having considerably improved within the last two or three hours, we had bagged in regal style right throughout. Our bag for the day, over four dogs, was ninety-three brace of grouse, besides a score of rabbits, the plovers I have mentioned, a hare, and

half-a-dozen snipe, which latter we picked up from sundry marshy hollows.

By-the-way, snipe were uncommonly scarce, but the continued drought accounts for it.

As regards the grouse, I do not believe we shot more than a dozen, without the dogs had pointed them, and therefore the numerous points we had in the course of the day, may readily be reckoned and estimated. It was a glorious treat, indeed, and may dogs again, for ever, be used in the pursuit of sport! That is my sincerest wish.

Altogether, then, "glorious twelfth" was indeed a glorious day. Throughout the length and breadth of the moors, in England and Scotland, there came nothing but congratulations to be heard on all sides, as to the magnificent show of birds and the rare sport experienced. This, then, made ample compensation for the bothers which assailed grouse-shooters on account of the disease within the previous four years; and let us trust that, practically, we have seen the last of that unbounded nuisance. It exists still in some parts, I am told, but then it ought to be circumscribed, and stamped out at once if possible; and surely it is within the powers of moor-owners and lessees to get it done, even if the whole of their stock had to be exterminated.

In conclusion, I beg to tender my thanks to the friends with whom I spent such a "glorious twelfth." I could not stop longer—much against their entreaties, and much against my own wishes—but hoped soon again to have another turn over the moor.

CHAPTER II.

SNIPE-SHOOTING IN IRELAND.

"WILL you come and have a shy over one of the best bits of snipe ground in our part of the country?" said an Irish friend to me at an hotel in Dublin, where I had just arrived.

I accepted the proposal with enthusiasm; and need I add that, as I had no time to lose, we made up our minds to go on at once? and a forty-mile ride by train, and a ten-mile drive in my companion's jaunting car, brought us to his "roosting-place." It was about 12.30 P.M., and I was glad to turn in, without delay. A glass of whisky, with the very smallest amount of water, sent me off to sleep like a top, and I dreamt of snipe rising around me, all "tchicking" me well-nigh to madness.

"We must be in the marsh the very moment daylight begins to be strong," said my friend, "for the birds are mostly ready to depart when the sun gets rather high and hot."

We breakfasted by candlelight, and soon despatched our meal.

We then repaired to the yard, where we found Patrick (my friend's factotum—coachman, groom, valet, and game-keeper, all rolled up into one jovial sort of body) seated on

the box of the car; and he gathered up the reins when he saw us emerging from the house.

It was still dark, and the way the fellow drove us down into the valley, turning sharp corners with a swish, and never slackening speed any way, whether going up or down, was a treat. Nevertheless, he nearly landed us, in turns, on the roadside, but we arrived with whole skins near a gate, whereat our driver pulled up, and we dismounted. A man was waiting there to take the car home, and Patrick slinging the game-bag on his back, and two cartridge-bags well filled, on either shoulder, we loaded our guns, flung our legs over the gate, and entered into the sport on hand just when the sun was rising.

The morning was lovely, and the breeze somewhat keen—a feature that I have always noticed belongs to the atmosphere of the "Emerald Oisle."

We had two setters, and they began by pointing near the road, in a brambly bush about a cubic foot in size.

"A hare!" quoth Pat.

And it was. It proved to be a tolerably difficult shot, as those beggars, in that part of the world, are always more or less on the run, most of the peasants owning lurchers and half-bred greyhounds that do nothing all the day, and part of the night, but prowl about to pick up whatever they can find. This makes hares tolerably wary, and the way this one cut about to the right, to the left, and in all sorts of ways, was a teazer to the gun. I missed her with my first barrel, and my friend with both his, but my last hit puss, and we got her after all.

Those shooters who assert that hare-shooting is very easy, ought to be "entered" on Irish hares, bred under the aforementioned circumstances, and then they would find

out that a fair percentage of the runners would give them the slip.

The hare bagged, one of the dogs found a covey of partridges, all pretty forward; but, of course, we did not molest them. (This was taking place in August.) There were sixteen young ones and the two parents, and *that* looked well for September sport.

Beyond the meadow was the bog, and for miles it extended right and left. In front it went as far as the mountain, and we had therefore plenty of ground to quarter, if we felt inclined to quarter it all.

The walking altered somewhat suddenly. From the dry, springy ground of the meadow we entered upon a soft bog, at times very wet; in some places bare, in others pretty thickly covered over with reeds and grass, yet damp with the morning dew—in consequence whereof, in five minutes, my legs, up to my thighs, were as thoroughly wet as if I had stepped into a ditch.

The dogs began their quartering without delay, and both found, almost simultaneously, and near each other.

"That is a whisp," said my companion; "there will be five or six birds there. Let us both go, and keep our eyes open; we ought to get two couples out of that lot."

We did not, though, for I missed my first shot in a shameful manner; and, only by a fluke, did I succeed in wounding the twisty bird with my second. My friend grassed both his birds in a workmanlike manner, and he could not help looking at Patrick, as much as to say:

"We will show him" (meaning me) "how snipe-shooting ought to be carried on."

This naturally put me on my mettle, and I resolved to do my very best, making up my mind to fire in my usual snap-shooting fashion, and not to delay on any considera-

tion, taking it for granted that, if I missed the first shot, I should have time to place the second; and if I scored with the first, well, I could "help" another bird to a dose, too, if one happened to get up then.

But I found my intended programme very deficient, from reasons over which I had no control, and the stumbling-block proved to be my ordinary cartridges, for these, joined to the tight-carrying properties of my modified choke-bore, simply nonplussed me. I could not hit the birds. By that I do not mean that I did not kill any at all; I did certainly knock over two or three, but I missed half-a-dozen shots almost running, owing to the birds springing up at such a short range that I either clean missed with my tight loads, or else I smashed the bird—but the former was the rule.

"I tell you what it is," I then remarked, "it is not of the slightest use for me to throw away my ammunition in that style; I must stop and alter my cartridges."

Out of the game-bag came the corkscrew we intended using for our drinks, and I sat down on a dry bank, with Pat in attendance. I emptied the shot out of about forty of my cartridges, and withdrew from them about a fifth part of the Schultze powder. I then replaced the wads, filled the shells with the small shot, placed the top wad on, creased the cases over anyhow with the handle of the corkscrew, and then I felt satisfied.

The next point proved to be on a single bird, and I grassed it before it had got up more than a couple of yards above ground. It was not more than twenty yards from me when it got up, so that the cartridges were then just what they should be. I shall give a hint to that effect when ordering a fresh batch of cartridges, whenever I need any, for shooting snipe at close quarters. As regards the

birds that were a good way from the gun, the original cartridges I had were simply marvellous in their effects. Distance did not seem to matter; and as the birds are pretty tender, the cartridges were tolerably sure to be certain death to the majority. So far I had then nothing to disturb me, and with the right barrel loaded with a "doctored" cartridge, and the left one with an ordinary one, I got on first-rate, and my companion began to look sharp after his laurels, for I am a pretty good hand on snipe when my ammunition is right, and the birds not too wild. Ours were not, at least until eleven o'clock, when they began to be uncommonly fidgety. Moreover, there were not so many as usual—at least so my friend told me, for I had never been there before.

"Last year," he said, "I shot twenty couple in this very marsh in two hours' time, and I don't call that bad fun, by any means."

I quite agreed with him there. Snipe-shooting, when the birds are tolerably abundant, is simply right regal sport, and there is a certain charm in it which one does not meet in ordinary field-shooting. True, the walking is damp; but then, if boots and socks are changed as soon as shooting is over, there is no danger to dread, and this is not a very troublesome precaution to take. Moreover, some people like mud-larking—I do. I like floundering in a bog, and don't feel the wet as long as birds are to be seen; and splashing about in quagmires, when sporting, simply delighteth my soul. Truly, we are queerly constituted. When we are out for a walk, we pick out a cleanly-swept crossing when wishing to go over the street, if it has been raining ever so little. When out shooting we go through anything, as a matter of course. When we stopped for luncheon, we agreed

that two hard-working sewer-cleaners would have been a match for us in cleanliness, at that time at any rate. But we were very happy. Two or three lapwings, with their prettily-coloured tufts and plumage, half-a-dozen plovers, a sandpiper, twenty-seven snipe and jacksnipe, besides a hare, spread on the bank, looked very well, and we drank health and prosperity to all the game tribes with an enthusiasm that will be easily understood by gunners who read this.

Whilst at luncheon, we discussed the theory about snipe lifting themselves up on their bills when they intend rising, which theory created such a commotion in the snipe-shooting world some seasons ago. If snipe perform that sort of thing, no man can detect anything of the sort; it would be too quick work for any human eyes to perceive. That snipe lower their heads when going to spring is a necessary and unconscious action, which all living things must necessarily perform under the same circumstances. No man can jump, even a foot high, without lowering his head, and probably if he were a quadruped or a bird, and had a long snout or bill, the said snout or bill would pretty well touch the ground when he would be in the act of jumping; but anyhow, whether snipe do or do not use their bills when rising is a matter of the very smallest consequence. I should think knocking them over is the main point.

Our luncheon over, we had a quiet smoke, which was interrupted by both the dogs flushing a landrail and chasing it, much to our amusement. They were, however, sternly reproved, and dropped when called upon to do so, and we went in search of the long-legged customer. He ran, "you may bet your bottom dollar on it," as the Yankees say, but we ran the harder; and, finally, between

the three of us and the two dogs, he was compelled to rise, and I blew my nose ostentatiously before firing and killing it.

The dogs then went back to the stream, near a row of willow trees, and kept running up and down the bank, under the roots of an old willow. We went there to see what it was, and for a long time could not make it out. In fact, we had given it up, and were returning to the bog and to snipes, when Pat, who had remained behind, poking his stick under the roots, suddenly called out:

"There goes a maar-hen!"

And my companion, turning round in time, fetched the moorhen such a whack that its feathers went flying "all over the shop." The dogs were awfully tickled at seeing the black customer thus brought to book at last, and their little indulgence over, we resumed our *bonâ fide* sport, and they went on ranging.

We were exchanging remarks on the forthcoming partridge season, and finishing our cigars, when an exclamation from my friend made me look up, and, behold! a teal was rising majestically out of the stream. We stopped with a jerk, as well may be imagined; Pat downcharged the dogs—a not very necessary proceeding, as they were almost hidden in the thick grass and rushes; but still it kept them quiet, and that was something—and we kept our eyes on the teal. He got up very steadily, and evidently of his own accord, for after a half circle over the marsh, he turned back for a bend of the stream, and dropped there. We started at once at full trot for him. We went round behind a reed bed, and, at last, when we were right in front of the spot where we had seen the bird drop:

"Now," whispered my companion, "he is there!"

"No," I said, "he will be higher up. He is sure to have swum against the stream, especially after having seen us."

"Well," he sturdily maintained, "I say he is here. Bet you a crown!"

"Done!" I replied, "but as I do not wish to lose him, whatever our bet comes to, you stop where you are until I get a little higher up, and then we will advance together towards the water."

"All right," he nodded; and I went, running lightly and stooping.

When about eighty yards from my friend, I stop, turn to the left, lift up my hand as a signal, and we both advance. He clutches his gun so nervously that I laugh. But, Jerusalem! when I lift up my head, my breath is taken away, for there are, not one, but five teal in front of me, and they are all getting up, and look then as though there were fifty of them instead of five. However, I stop and blaze away deliberately, as teal are easy shots. I kill one with my first barrel, and perceiving that the rest (now fairly on their wings) are going to crowd, and are, in fact, crowding together, I bide my chance, and when two are actually one behind the other, I shoulder and fire at the same moment, and forthwith knock both into their happy feeding-ground.

"Bravo!" shouts my companion, who had seen it all, and Pat looks at me with far more respect than he had done until then, and he scratches his ears, and then his nose, and looks very suggestively at his master.

"That was not only a good shot," my friend remarks, "but a well-calculated one;" then, taking off his hat, and inclining his head respectfully; "I bow to my master in the art; you have taught me a lesson!"

Of course I felt tremendously conceited, and, to put down my conceit, we had a quiet drain there and then.

Oh that good fellowship among sportsmen! How one's heart yearns for those companions who have with us perambulated moor, marsh, or covert! One of the most enthusiastic shooters it has ever been my luck to meet with (and that was through *Bell's Life*, be it mentioned) is now in San Francisco, and I often wish he were back, just to feel his hand once more in mine, and to hear his cheery

"Well, what sport, my boy?"

My Irish companion is just a fellow of the "same kidney," and when we parted at night he wrung my hand with genuine brotherly love.

"When you come to Ireland, come to me," said he. And I said I would, from the innermost recesses of my heart.

CHAPTER III.

THE "FIRST."

WE went down to the farm overnight, on Thursday, August 31st, and what a tribe of shooters and dogs encumbered the London Bridge platform! In our compartment were three more shooters; the nettings overhead were piled threateningly high; the spare seats were encumbered up to the ceiling with overcoats, game-bags, and cartridge bags; and, underneath the seats, sundry gun-boxes were lying "promiscuous like."

One of the subjects of discussion amongst us was that respecting the restrictions brought to bear on the carriage of gunpowder by the Non-Explosives Act. It cannot be denied that the Act is uncommonly hard on sportsmen, and it may be argued that there was but little ground for inflicting such expenses and restrictions on a class of men, who, as a rule, are mighty careful with their arms and ammunition. I have never heard of any railway or carriage mishap happening through cartridges actually in transit, by train or otherwise, having accidentally exploded; and I humbly venture to think that it is a mistake to put any restrictions on such transit. Cartridges cannot explode spontaneously, and it is, therefore, absurd to class them

with dynamite and other stuffs of the "same kidney," which may explode of their own accord or on the slightest shock.

In the midst of our conversation, one of our companions left us, I believe, at Blackheath, and we wondered thereat. But one of the two remaining strangers informed us that in the neighbourhood there were some fair, though small farms, where nice sport, for the extent of ground, could be obtained, and no doubt our quondam friend was bound for one of these. The speaker himself left us at Gravesend, and we arrived at our destination somewhere near 9 o'clock.

"Hallo, keeper," cried the captain, my host, to a stalwart bearded man, with corduroy breeches, gaiters, and velveteen coat, who was standing near one of the exit gates, "here we are; see about the lot in this compartment. It's all ours."

And whilst the man and his under-keeper, helped by a couple of porters, conveyed our traps and dogs to the cart, we went to an hotel close by, and had some refreshment, during which the captain explained that he had rented a rather large bit of ground, twelve miles away, and that rooms, four in number, would be at our disposal at the farmhouse.

We then found the dog-cart at the door, and forthwith embarked. We had a heavy load, but the horse, a strapping big gray, put his shoulder to his collar with a will, and we arrived at 10.30 P.M. at the farm-gate. Of course our arrival had been watched for. There was an urchin munching the handle of a small whip hard by, that I could swear had been the first to herald our approach, for no one but he, amongst those who stood about, could have uttered the, "they be a-coming, master," in the shrill voice we had heard, when we were yet near the old hop ground.

The old farmer was delighted, his family enchanted, the little cowherd astounded, the farm dogs beyond themselves; and, altogether, ours was a stupendous reception.

We were conducted to our rooms (all on the ground floor—hurrah!) and forthwith we prepared for supper.

We spent a most delightful evening; the captain proposed a song; this led to a dance, which was improvised then and there, he taking the piano in turns with the eldest daughter of the family, and at 12.30 we were still up. The keeper and his man had left for the fields as soon as we had been safely landed in the yard. They had gone their final rounds to see if the watchers were at their posts, and, nothing unusual occurring, it was with unmixed satisfaction that we saw velveteens in the morning, and heard from his lips that the birds had not been disturbed. His next communication, however, caused a commotion at the breakfast table.

"There be a few drops o' rain a-falling," said he.

"What! now?" we exclaimed, simultaneously, with horror, and our knives and folks held up in dismay.

"Yes," he nodded, "now; but it won't be much, I am thinking."

We all bolted on to the lawn to have a look, and we scanned the horizon with very lively interest.

Quoth the farmer: "It won't be much, gentlemen, and I don't think it will disturb your shooting. However, let us see what the barometer says."

The oracle was inclined to turn fair.

"But then," argued the captain, *sotto voce*, "these country oracles are always out of order. Let us hope this one is all right."

And eventually it turned out that it was. A rare blessing this, as partridge-shooting in rainy weather is anything

but a treat. However, we had about three hours of it; then it cleared up, and the afternoon was simply delightful, as, although the weather kept dry, the sun did not shine too much, there was a nice little breeze blowing, and we therefore enjoyed the tramping very much indeed, it being neither hot nor cold, but just the sort of weather to walk thirty miles in without feeling distressed.

We began at 8.30 A.M., and our party numbered seven —viz. the farmer, whom Captain B. had asked to join us, the captain himself, his brother, myself, the keeper and his under-keeper, and a farm hand to help to carry our ammunition.

"If you would like to walk through the orchard," said the captain to me, "whilst we go round by the road, I daresay you will find a hare."

The farm hand volunteered to guide me, and we went.

Said he: "They always keeps near the hedge here, amongst the nettles and brambles; if you walk out here, sir, I'll go through the rubbish and beat it for you."

I loaded with two No. 6 Schultze cartridges, and he began:

"B-r-r-r! B-r-r-r!" and knocking about with his stick. I kept some twenty yards away, walking in a parallel line with the hedge. We traversed the whole length and found nothing.

Quoth the man: "Well, sir, I'm astonished! I've seen a big 'un in this very lot every morning for the last three weeks. . . ."

Then he stopped suddenly, open-mouthed, and pointed at a few yards from him.

"I'm blessed," said he, in a whisper, "I'm blessed if she is not there!"

And he flung his stick at a small bush, out of which

sprang a whacking good hare. Bang! and I see the shot making a hole, with a thud in the turf, whilst the hare, at full speed, makes for the opposite hedge, and dives over the ditch, but bang went the second Schultze cartridge. Just in time, by Jove! and there was puss, kicking convulsively.

"I thought you would have let her go altogether," said the farm labourer; "but better late than never, mister" (this very patronisingly) "and here she is!"

And he stooped into the hedge and pulled her out.

"What is it?" called out my friend's voice, quite close by; and, indeed, it turned out that we were walking then along the road where my companions were making their way.

"A hare," I replied.

"Ah! told you you'd find one there, my boy!" exclaimed the captain. "Now, if you will come out and join us, we will do this clover here. It is a fine field, and there will be a covey or two for certain."

Nothing loath, we made our way to the gate just as it began to rain again. I was putting down my hat over my eyes, when up went fifteen birds, all in a lump, from the orchard over the hedge. Bang, bang! I go at the lot, and got two. My friends on the other side fire away like fun, and we got seven birds.

"You seem to have everything your own way," they tell me, laughingly, when I rejoin them. And we entered the clover.

Two pointers, father and son, are slipped, and they start at such a rate that the drops of rain on the clover fly about in the air like millions of pearls. Crack! down goes the old dog, and slap! down goes the young one, backing his "da." We went towards the point. Seventeen birds rose, according to my account—eighteen according to the

farmer's. He bagged one, I bagged one, the captain cleared his brace, and his brother nailed one as dead as a tile, and wounded another which flew over the hedge, and we gave it up as a lost bird.

Thereupon the farmer complained of his powder. He ought to have bagged his first bird. I said nothing, but like Pat's parrot, I thought a good deal. The fact was I hurried myself too much, and, besides, four guns on a covey are one or two guns too many. Just when you fire someone else does the same, and it gives a start to your birds, or else you give a start to someone else's. So I made a mem not to crowd too much with my friends, and I found the recipe a perfect cure.

On our firing, the young dog got up, pounced on one of the dead birds, and made his lunch on it. The keeper thereupon called him "a beauty and a nice doggy," patted his own knee until he had laid hold of him, and then gave him a licking, of which the youngster stood much in need. While this little training was going on, the old dog slunk behind the keeper, and remained there until the process was over, evidently "making notes on it." The licking at an end, the youngster shook himself vehemently, and appeared to have the partridge heavy on his conscience, but when sent on he forgot all his troubles, and the ranging began anew. They found another covey on the other side of the field, and when we closed on them I stretched out to the left, and had the pleasure of doing a splendid right and left on the old cock and a young bird. Whilst we were all reloading, a hare got up, and ran along the border of the crop, as though someone had set fire to her tail. The young pointer thought this another opportunity not to be lost sight of, and put on all steam to chase. Fortunately I stopped the hare, but it was a "shave" for the dog, as he was pouncing so

quickly on the hare that the shot had hardly reached it when he tumbled on deceased. This brilliant performance got the unlucky wight another tanning. It was tiresome, but it was to be done; most young dogs are too eager, when brought on to sport in earnest, and a few lessons of that sort soon let them know what they are to do and not to do. This one, in particular, was like wildfire; he ranged somewhat wildly, and ran always jealous of his leader; but he had a wonderfully good nose, and he pinned us half-a-dozen coveys at something like eighty yards when going express, and his points were so sudden as to almost knock him "in a heap" in the stubble. So that he really was worth training and perfecting in his training.

Until eleven o'clock the drizzling rain bothered us, and, no doubt, it also bothered the birds, who evidently did not know where to go for shelter. We found two coveys on a road, and one in a lane. Two were flushed from a pit, and we found the turnips pretty well empty. The mess we were in may be imagined, and, in fact, we were uncomfortably wet. It cleared up, however, just then, and I remarked that a change of boots, socks, and clothes would be a very pleasant diversion, so we made tracks for the house and our lunch. We had twenty-three brace of birds, five hares, and two rabbits.

As concerned the latter, we had not been as yet in their favourite haunts, and were bound to kill our fill of them in the course of the afternoon, if we went near the coverts, which we did; but of this more anon.

During luncheon time the heavy black clouds cleared up, and sailed away, much to our satisfaction, and when we stalked forth, after our meal, the weather was clear and bracing, and we felt like giants refreshed. We had not another drop of rain the whole of the two days we stayed.

We went, this time, with a fresh brace of dogs, and began at the back of the house, in a fine turnip-field. Three coveys in this, for certain, we agreed; but, through slipping the dogs with the wind, instead of waiting until we had gone round, the under-keeper lost us two good shots, as the new dogs, in their eagerness, went so wild and without scent, that they flushed two coveys before we could get them down-charged. This done, however, the man was sharply ordered to secure them, and we went round by the lane. Then we went over the gate, and began grandly, as both dogs found almost as soon as they were let go.

The captain then made a very remarkable double shot. Just as the birds were rising, a wood-pigeon happened to be passing over head at a goodish range, and Captain B. floored him quite behind us, and turned round in time to fetch a bird down as well. I like that sort of quick, clever work immensely, and though the pigeon was not worth a partridge, the shot was none the less meritorious. In fact, it was splendidly done, as the pigeon was going at a tremendous rate, and quite in an opposite direction to the covey.

We were only three shooting during the afternoon, our old farmer friend declaring that he had enjoyed himself thoroughly in the morning, and had had enough for the day. When we reached the covert, near which a rare bit of clover lay, the keeper took us to a lane, each side of which had rabbit-holes, and, securing the pointers, the men began to belabour the hedges with their sticks.

"Rabbit going down, sir!"

"Rabbit your way, captain!"

"Here is another!"

"There he goes!"

And the fusillade was a treat.

Say what we like, rabbits have always given rise to a good deal of fun, and probably always will. We laughed more over their tricks to escape than we had done all day during our orthodox sport, and it does one's heart good to join in a *déroute* of that sort.

I have always had a weakness for rabbit-shooting, which is, nevertheless, by excellence, the sport where one ought to be exceedingly cautious. None but men thoroughly cool-headed should join in it, for it is a sort of sport that necessarily entails very quick shooting, and a quick decision as to when, how, and where to shoot. Thus we had a rabbit that positively ran the gauntlet of all of us. Nobody fired, and that was as it should have been. But, had any tyro been with us, he would have risked it, and would probably have succeeded in laming one of us. I was once, in Derbyshire, at a rabbit-shooting party, on a young squire's land, and this youthful sportsman fired a barrel between my legs at a dodging rabbit. He missed me, and missed the bunny, but I "felt the wind of the shot," and that was rather coldish to one's feelings. Such men ought to shoot alone, for there is no enjoyment in a party of shooters when one is known to be a reckless firer. We all have met with such men, and we all know what a wide berth is given them by everybody.

To return to our "first," we found the jolly afternoon most congenial to ourselves and to the birds, and made a superb bag. At about 3.30 P.M. we had splendid sport, the birds having gone into turnips and clover and other heavy covert; and the coveys by that time being pretty well scared, we got the birds by ones, twos, and threes; and, of course, in such cases they had but few chances to escape three practised shooters. It was absolutely royal sport.

We saw, during the afternoon, about a score of shooters on the neighbouring lands; and afterwards heard from the keepers that everywhere sport had been excellent. In fact, for years there had not been such an abundance of winged and ground game.

The "first" then, in its way, proved fully equal to "glorious twelfth," and I thank my stars that it has been given me to enjoy both, for they mark a brilliant epoch in my sporting career.

We stopped work as soon as the birds began to "call for the night," as we did not consider it sportsman-like to pursue birds when they tell you where they are preparing to jug.

Great were the rejoicings that night and the yarns at the farmhouse. Nevertheless we retired to rest in pretty good time; and the next day we were again at the birds until 4 P.M., when we came back to town. We had over sixty brace for our two days' sport.

I tender my heartiest thanks to my gallant friend for his very kind invitation; and must say that never in all my life have I enjoyed better sport, better generalship; and as for good fellowship, why, all the sportsmen are nice fellows and jolly companions. There is therefore no need to dwell upon that in this particular case.

CHAPTER IV.

RABBITING IN DOWNS.

"WEATHER permitting," wrote their owner to me, "I will have two days in the downs. Will you join me? If so, come to-morrow."

I replied, laconically, "Coming," and packed up.

The downs are situated on the south-east coast. They extend for several miles along the sea-shore, and I knew them to be regular "teasers" for rabbit-shooting, inasmuch as they are in places thickly covered over with prickly brambles, long grass, withered reeds, &c. &c., and in two or three spots they have some sort of short covert, made up of bushes as thickly studded with thorns and briers as the back of a hedgehog is with bristles.

Previous to taking my departure I set myself to work on my cartridges, and reduced the powder, in about a hundred of them, by a good third in quantity. I replaced the thin powder wads and the thick padded wads, filled the cases with shot No. 6, and felt satisfied that, at the short ranges I had to expect, these cartridges would do their duty. In this I was not disappointed; but had I allowed the ordinary amount of powder and shot to remain undisturbed, it would have been almost useless trying to

shoot with them at distances varying between ten and twenty yards.

These ranges are usually to be reckoned upon; and it is, indeed, rare to have a long shot in the downs, unless when scrambling up to the top of a sand-hill one chances, when there, to spy a rabbit on an opposite sand-hill, making his way somewhere to his burrow, across a bit of open sand; but such opportunities are few and far between. The vast majority of shots occur close to the shooter, as the rabbits, being disturbed, make their way swiftly under and through the rank grass and prickly shrubs. Snap shooting and "shooting on spec" must, therefore, be resorted to, and such styles must be practised quickly, otherwise the rabbit "turns up a corner," and there you are, without a shot.

For that sort of work a short gun is a very handy tool to sport with. For those living near the spot that is the sort of weapon to use; but those who have to go a long way for sport cannot carry two guns, and as birds as well as rabbits may turn up to be shot at, one likes to have an ordinary gun to shoot with, so as to be master of the situation at any time. Hence my going with my ordinary gun, whereas my host sported his short rabbit breechloader, besides which, for long shots at standing rabbits, the keeper carried his master's rabbit rifle—a very accurate and handy instrument, by-the-way, much to my astonishment, for I have found that very many so-called rook and rabbit rifles are so indifferently bored, and so carelessly sighted, that unless one undertakes, by a series of trials, to find out the idiosyncrasies of the weapons, and aims accordingly, it is almost useless trying to sport with them.

I remember buying one in a hurry years ago, and finding on trial that I had to aim point-blank a foot to the left

of any point I wanted to hit. I therefore had to hammer the fore-sight to the right until it almost reached the right side, and aim with it then, when I was tolerably successful; but this awkward position of the said sight was always an eyesore to me.

Well, we started from the house a little after 9 o'clock, and walked leisurely to the downs, about a mile across the meadows and pastures. The keeper had a brace of ferrets ready muzzled in his pockets, and he led three rabbit dogs—two were beagles, and the other a spaniel. The downs stretching along the shore, like a belt, some hundred yards wide at the narrowest part, and half a mile, perhaps, at the widest, we had plenty of ground to practise upon, and began near the salt marsh, where a pretty thick covert lines the first half-dozen hills and hollows. I knew I should have no long shot there, and prepared to load with two of my doctored Schultze cartridges; but my host hinting that we might find a covey of partridges or two, I was fain to be content with an ordinary cartridge in the left barrel and a doctored one in the right, and we began. I took the left, my host took the right wing, the keeper walking in the middle, and beating the covert as we went.

My first steps in the brambles sprang a bunny. I saw him spring away, but no more, and therefore could not fire. Whilst trying to make him out, one of the beagles sounded the alarm, and broke back in chase. The rabbit, closely pursued, left the covert for the open path on the hill, and I got him there. Before he had time to know what was going on, the beagle laid hold of him, and number one was bagged.

On the other side of the sandhill I heard bang, bang! and as my host's voice was heard calling out to the spaniel

"Bring it here!" I concluded that he, too, had made a nailer.

Turning back again, I saw three rabbits about a hundred yards away, going into a hole half way up a sand-hill. I marked the spot carefully, promising the bunnies a ferret visit when I got there, and went on.

"There he goes, sir!" calls out the man, pointing, in zigzag fashion, somewhere about the grass before his feet. I stopped, watching the front, and when the rabbit showed himself within ten yards of me, I just caught him in time. The noise sprang two more, one on my right, and one in front. I fired at the latter, but my ordinary cartridge was too strong, did not scatter the shot at the range, and I missed clean. I reloaded quickly, and a bang, and a call, "Look out, forward!" from my friend, attracting my attention, I caught sight of his bunny, wounded, trying to get into the hollow where, presumably, his abode was situated, and to prevent him from tumbling therein I polished him off at a goodish range with my left barrel.

I was then quite close to the sea-shore, and hearing some "calls" I peeped over the sandhills and saw a company of sandpipers and ox-birds feeding by the rising tide, but yet a very long way from the downs; too far, by a good deal, for a shot from a smooth-bore loaded with shot; but, for the fun of the thing, I called the keeper, and asked him for the rabbit rifle, when, aiming in the midst of the company, I let fly, and the bullet actually went through their midst and killed one. The others must have been scared considerably, judging from the way in which they flew off, something like the sparks from a catherine-wheel. The spaniel was sent to pick up the bird, and we found that the bullet had laid the bird's back open, so that death must have been instantaneous.

But what a fluke this was! I have frequently fired bullets for practice, when at sea, at flocks of ducks, widgeons, teal, geese, and swan, when they were over shallow flats where we could not sail; but to the best of my knowledge I never hit one, although they offered a great deal more surface to hit than the sandpipers I had fired at. Of course it was just a matter of luck.

We then resumed our rabbiting, and as we were near the hole where I had seen three bunnies taking refuge, I thought that the ferrets' turn had now come, and the keeper calling up and securing the dogs (in this he experienced no small difficulty, as they were intent on enjoying themselves, and would hardly listen to him for awhile), he placed a ferret at the hole, and we watched the exodus with very lively interest. Hardly had the ferret been in than out jumped a rabbit. Bang, bang! bang, bang! and he is gone.

We reload. Another rabbit, no doubt astonished at the row we had just kicked up, is at the mouth of the burrow, and seems disinclined to come out; but the ferret evidently is close behind him, for bunny suddenly gives a start and away he darts. This time I send him sprawling down the sandhill. Then out came the third rabbit, but after a short run he begins zigzagging, and we fire to his left, to his right, in front of him, and at his back, much to our amusement and to his consternation.

"Missed, by Jove!" I exclaimed; but he all at once collapses, kicks, and expires under a bush.

"Well," I remarked, "the three rabbits I saw going into that hole we can now account for, but there must be some more, since the ferret does not come out;" and we stopped watching for at least five minutes.

"There must be something wrong," we then argue, and

the keeper sets to work to find out the truant's whereabout. He lies down and pokes his arm in the hole.

"There are two roads," says he; then he stops, feels with his hand; "I have got her," he adds. Then he exclaims, "No! it is a rabbit," and he pulls it out alive and well, but with its back badly scratched, and the ferret comes out at the mouth, and is instantly collared by the man. "Shall I let the rabbit go, sir?" asks the keeper.

"By all means," we rejoin, "that is, if he is all right and fit to run."

Well, yes, he was fit to run, seeing that he nearly evaded our shot, through each of us delaying firing, thinking that the other fellow would kill it. Of course my friend with his short gun could do nothing when once the rabbit was over twenty yards off, but I, with my modified choke-bore and long-range Schultze cartridge, feared nothing, as long as a fair sight could be had; and when I found that my host did not fire, I hastily put up the gun, and luckily stopped the runaway.

The dogs were then slipped once more, and for an hour or two we continued our sport, then sat down in a hollow, well sheltered from the wind, and proceeded to discuss our lunch.

What appetites we had to be sure! And how pretty the sea-panorama before us did look, with its scores of large and small craft under full sail in all the directions of the compass!

The sun shone on the scene, and made the grass around us very green, the sea very blue, and the sky lovely, being tinted pink and gold on the clouds, and sky-blue in the open. The air was mild and pleasant, owing to the moderately strong breeze which tempered the otherwise rather too ardent rays of the sun.

Whilst we were at luncheon my friend's attention was attracted by his keeper, and without more ado he picked up the Holland rifle and joined the man. The latter pointed out in the distance; I saw my host raising the "sight," levelling the rifle; a small puff of smoke issued from the barrel, the crack reached my ears, and the man got up and went to pick up the rabbit.

"A hundred yards, if an inch," then said my companion, as he reseated himself by my side, "and the rabbit rolled over dead. Do you call that good shooting or not?"

Of course I assented at once, and the keeper returning with the unlucky bunny, we examined it, and found that the bullet had gone clean through both sides. A fairer and better shot could not have been made.

"I should like to have a try myself with the rifle," I then hinted.

"All right, sir," said the man; "within a quarter of an hour, or less, there will be some rabbits out again, and I will call you then;" and he resumed his watch from the top of our sandhill, hiding his head behind a large belt of coarse grass, which grew all over the top.

Presently, in the midst of a libation, and whilst my nose was in a glass of sherry, the man lifts up his hand, and I nearly choke myself in my hurry to obey the motion. I clamber near him, and my friend joins us. The man silently points to the mouth of a burrow, and we perceive a rabbit at the entrance, sitting up, and evidently listening, in order to make sure that everything is peaceful before venturing out any farther.

"A fine shot," whispers my friend in my ear; "eighty yards, if so much, and presenting a full front; aim under his jaw," adds he; and he places the rifle in my hands.

"If he is not killed on the spot we shall lose him," I

remark, "because he is sure to tumble into his hole in his dying moments."

"You can't help killing him on the spot," he rejoins, "if you hit him at all. Now for it."

I bring up the rifle very quietly. Meanwhile the rabbit, satisfied that no one was near, I suppose, trots out a yard, then sits up again, and he repeatedly passes both his paws over his nose, pretty well like a kitten making its toilet. I aim point-blank at his jaw, and crack goes the bullet.

"Well done," says my friend, tumbling down back to our bottles.

I look up and see the bunny on his back, quite motionless, and then rejoin my companion, whilst the man goes to gather the rabbit. I of course declared I was very much amused by this accurate shooting, and my host, kindly placing the rifle at my disposal, I made some very good practice with it at rabbits during my two days' stay.

My friend himself was remarkably clever with it, knocking off a cork from the top of a bottle at an extraordinary range, and killing rabbits at all distances whenever he could clearly see them. Of course this was only practicable when we chanced to spy them unaware of our presence; and by waiting until they were still we generally had a shot.

As regards our ordinary shooting, we had our fill of it, and I found my cartridges everything I could wish. The dogs did their duty well and unsparingly. The two ferrets worked the holes in a business-like manner; and altogether we had two charming days' sport in the downs.

At the close of the second day we had a diversion in the shape of seven herons gravely settling down on the sands of the shore, and beginning feeding. I saw them

when they were flying over the downs, watched them settling, and then told my friend.

"We can easily stalk them," quoth he, "if we keep in the downs, and take care to remain behind the sandhills."

I had carefully marked the sandhill near which they had settled, and we reached the spot without any mishap, the birds never suspecting that we were so near them. When therefore we popped up close to them, their dismay was immense, and the way in which they threw themselves on their pinions was very extraordinary. As a matter of fact, however, they could not rise without running a few steps, and under such circumstances it need not be wondered at that our barrels told very plainly on them. I had loaded with two ordinary Schultze, and grassed my first bird stone dead. By that time the others were some distance off, but I brought another down badly wounded. My friend's first shot had wounded one, and he finished it off with his second barrel. The dogs ran to the birds, but the wounded one kept them at bay very successfully.

"Give him a bullet," urged my companion.

"No," I said; "I am all in a flutter, like a young miss; give it him yourself."

The dogs were called back, and when he did fire, the long-necked bird went down like a castle of cards; and this ended our excursion. It was getting dark, and we had walked all day up and down the sandhills, and trudging in the more or less soft sand is a very tiring sort of tramping, as those who have tried it will readily and feelingly testify. We were, however, very pleased and happy, notwithstanding our fatigue, and the concluding scene had not a little contributed to enliven our sport. It

was therefore with feelings of gratitude, not unmixed with regret, that I thanked my pleasant host when we parted at the railway station, and I shall for a long time cherish the remembrance of my two days spent with him "rabbiting in the downs."

CHAPTER V.

REDLEG SHOOTING IN NORFOLK.

IT was towards the end of August, when passers-by (had there been any) might have observed "Wildfowler" sitting disconsolately on the bank of the river Yare.

"Wildfowler" was disgusted. He had been trudging six or seven miles with his gun, under a broiling August sun, and had only bagged two sandpipers.

My heart was broken, figuratively speaking; and when I came to think of the trudge back, over the awful seven miles again, no wonder I sat down, mopped my damp brow, and groaned.

In the midst of my meditations a stout farmer turned up, arrayed in leggings, and accompanied by his collie. He went to inspect some horned cattle in the marsh, then sent his dog for a spin to rouse a sleepy sheep, and next caught sight of me. No doubt he thought I was up to no good, all alone in that most lonely of places; but when he drew nearer, and perceived my bag and gun, and saw that my dog was a spaniel, his countenance broke into a smile, and as he flung his legs over the gate, he broke silence by shouting:

"Good-morning to you, sir! Be you having any sport?"

"Oh, ah! yes; lovely sport, to be sure," I rejoined, with

a groan, as I held my two pipers by the legs at arm's length for his inspection. "That is all I have been able to see since I left Yarmouth this morning at some unearthly hour."

The worthy man was much amused by the energy with which I expressed my feelings, and after grinning at the two wretched birds, he took off his hat, rubbed his ear, and then said :

"I think I could show you a little better sport than that, if you would like to come round with me."

"Where to ?" I asked, jumping up with alacrity.

"Oh ! over my marsh. You will find, I daresay, a few snipe here and there, perhaps a heron or two, and maybe a teal. Be you coming ?"

What a question to ask me !

Why, I could have thrown my arms around his neck, and hugged him, and sworn him eternal friendship. He swung my bag on his arm, I picked up the gun, and off we went.

"Dog a good 'un, mister ?" said he, as we went on.

"Yes," I said, "he is good at finding the birds, and keeps well within range, but he won't retrieve, worse luck !"

"Oh, that don't matter here !" he rejoined ; "the ditches ain't wide."

"Still," I remarked, "I wish he would retrieve. It is handy, you know, at all times ; but that dog taught me a lesson. I thought all dogs could be trained, but this one's tactics beat me altogether. The moment he sees that the lesson is going to begin, he turns sulky, lies down, and will not stir. What can I do with him ?"

This was a fact then, but matters have altered since with that spaniel.

Well, the first ditch we came to yielded no birds, but

the second had a full snipe; and, altogether, I bagged three snipe and a lapwing in the worthy grazier's marsh.

Then we went towards the village, where the farm buildings appeared amidst a lot of fine trees; and when we reached my host's abode we sat down, conversing on sporting topics.

There was fair coursing to be had, I was told, and most of the graziers and farmers kept greyhounds. Then, again, the prospects for the shooting season, then so very near at hand, were good. Redlegs were abundant, and at this news I became all attention.

"Now," I said, "I have not shot redlegs since I went to stay for a month with a friend in one of the warm provinces of France; I should like to try it here, and would not mind giving a trifle for the privilege. Could I get anything of the sort?"

My host smiled, and said he had no doubt I could have a try, at any rate.

"You will find homely fare," he went on, "and we will do our best to show you sport; but as to payment, and all that sort of thing, it is quite out of the question altogether."

"But——" I was going to remark.

"No, no," he said, holding up his hand; "we could not hear of it. Here is to you, sir;" and he drained his glass with the look of a man who had definitively settled a question.

The first of September was the next day but one. This gave us time to arrange things. I was to come down to the farm the next afternoon, sleep there, and we would start early the next morning in my host's dog-cart for our ten-mile drive to his brother's farm.

This settled, I prepared for a start, but had to stop for

luncheon, after which we had more sporting talk; so that I did not set off until the sun was sinking behind the woody little hills in the west.

"I will see you to the river bank," quoth my host. "John, bring up my gun. I should like you to shoot a duck," said my newly-made friend; "there has been a couple of them for the last two or three evenings at the pond. I intended having a shy at them myself, but since you are here, you may as well have the fun."

The pond was large, and its banks thickly covered with reeds. On each side a wide ditch led into and from it, each almost choked with reeds.

When we came near the pond I caught sight of a little train of loose feathers, straw, &c., gliding along on the surface of the water, towards the opposite reed beds. I glanced at my companion. He, too, had seen it, and he nodded towards the other bank.

"They are paddling amongst the reeds," he whispered. "Do you send your dog round as soon as I am facing you, and we will have them."

He moved some twenty yards farther, and when he turned towards me I motioned to the dog to go on to the right. He started at full speed, and we soon lost sight of him. Presently we see the two birds come out paddling, evidently not uneasy at all; but, on catching sight of us, a panic seizes them; they flap back; but the dog comes down into the reeds with such a splash that the birds, without any further hesitation, take to their wings, and they rise grandly. The duck comes our way, and I nail her forthwith; but the drake had swept back, and the consequence was he was too far to offer a satisfactory shot, so we did not fire at him.

Our duck bagged, we walked towards the bank of the

river, and whilst doing so I perceived the top of the white sails of a yacht coming up the river.

"It looks uncommonly like my friend's boat," I said; and the moment we reached the wall, I recognised her at once, and my friends on board perceiving me, brought her to and dropped anchor. Charlie and the two other fellows came ashore in a punt they had hired at the bridge, as the dingey would have been useless on the river Yare, and our greetings were very noisy indeed. I introduced my new friend, and we all went aboard, and spent a very pleasant couple of hours together. We arranged at first to remain at anchor where we were, as I thought we would have very good fun at dusk, and in the early morning, with the flocks of shore birds; but our two university fellows were too wild to accept the notion kindly. So they soon remonstrated with me.

"Oh, hang it!" said one, "what is the good of sticking here amidst all these mud flats, with nothing to do and nobody to see? Let us go back to Yarmouth. Lots of fun there, at any rate! Then we will sail back to-morrow, if you like."

This being agreed to, we rowed the farmer ashore, and in an hour or so we were moored near the bridge.

Next day we sailed back, and were all asked ashore to dine at the farmhouse. Neither of my yachting friends cared for shooting, so they sailed back in the evening, but I slept at the farm, and the next morning, at 8 o'clock, we were entering the farmyard of my worthy friend's brother.

"The major and his party," said the latter, "have been at it for the last hour. I daresay a good many of their birds will be driven on to the big wuzzle field; we will go there to begin with."

Three of the farm hands accompanied us, and we had,

including Rover (my spaniel), four dogs—two pointers and two spaniels.

Now Rover had never seen partridges, except when one or two had been occasionally flushed in the marsh, as his specialty was snipe. I therefore kept him to heel to begin with, and eventually he turned out very handy; but of this more anon.

We crossed the road and entered an immense stubble, where there was no difficulty in performing the beating satisfactorily, as the field was very level, and there was just enough stubble to give covert to the birds. I was given the middle place, and in a line with our men we crossed the field, then turned back by the hedge, as it was too large to trust to one turn to do the work well. The pointers, dog and bitch, had been slipped at the gate, and they ranged in good style. On our turning to the left a hare was sprung, and the bitch chased it for some fifty yards—a rather excusable performance, it being the first day of the season. On being sternly called upon to desist by her master she crouched to the ground, wistfully looking towards the spot where the hare had broken through the hedge. Meanwhile, the dog was winding near a cart, and finally he came to a point. We walked on, and when nearing the road, several birds rose some sixty yards from me, and my companion on my right being near them bagged two in first-rate style. On the report, a hare spurted from her form, just before the pointer, and I shot her. Then our men called out that birds were coming our way, and about a dozen redlegs passed over us like grouse at a drive. I got two of them, and my left companion bagged one.

We then perceived another shooting-party on the hill. They had evidently flushed the covey and sent it our way.

We then went to the "wuzzle," and several times the

dogs exhibited unmistakable signs that birds were about, so much so that we began walking very slowly and carefully, with our fingers on the triggers, ready at a moment's notice to blaze away at the game. The birds trotted on first-rate, as usual, under the shelter afforded them by the crop, and I thought it high time to try a dodge I had seen practised on the Continent. I signed to my companions to stand still; then I left them, and ran round with two of the farm lads as fast and as quietly as we could.

When we reached the corner towards which we had beaten the field, we awaited the approach of my friends; and when they were within sixty yards of us we went in, beating about, and calling out noisily. What I had expected took place. Astounded at such a row, part of the lot rose, and we bagged five. Then we sent the dogs in the space between us, and three more birds were found. They had evidently squatted, cowed by the reports of the guns, and were easily bagged. Then Rover went on a trail on his own hook, and as he seemed quite ready once or twice to mouth something, I started ahead of him, then bore towards him, and, calling out suddenly, I started another bird out of its wits, and it rose beautifully—only to fall almost in the very spot from which it had risen.

I confess I like shooting redlegs, and in fact prefer it to the orthodox gray partridge-shooting. Why, it is simply because (singular as it may appear) there is such a deal of bother about springing redlegs. And then, is not a red partridge by far more handsome than the old gray customer? Why, the red one is about as good as a pheasant for colour and brilliancy of plumage. Then again, look at its size and weight! When a man has shot fairly a dozen redlegs in a day, I say he has done well, and enjoyed himself far more when getting them than he would have done had he

shot fifty grays. Of course redlegs are not fashionable. They are such stupid birds, you see; they won't lie still and give no trouble. They will try every dodge they know of before allowing themselves to be seen. It is awfully hard on the sportsman—that is, on some sportsmen, who would like to drill their birds in the following manner: Scene, a turnip-field; weather magnificent; scent splendid. Enter a sportsman with two or three well-broken dogs, pointers or setters. He signs to his dogs, they go on ranging, and presently fall on point; sportsman thereupon makes some remarks to his attendant, blows his nose, walks very leisurely to each dog, and bags the birds. These stupid things await their turn with praiseworthy patience, in most cases, and forthwith grays are extolled to the skies. When any of them decline to await the sportsman's leisure they are called sneaks, or else something has startled them.

Well, unfortunately, or fortunately, the red partridge is a wary customer, with good legs as well as good wings, who keeps watch on everything, and uses every available wile in order to escape. This being so, is it not more meritorious in a sportsman to circumvent them cleverly than to shoot any amount of those other foolish birds that are so easily bagged? To give an idea of the extent to which prejudiced men may carry their feelings, I give an extract from a shooting-book, published not many years ago by an eminent London firm. The author, whoever he was, when treating of redlegs, states that "they are not at all good sport in the sense of ordinary partridge-shooting, as they will not meet you in a straightforward manner."

That is just it; nothing could express better the feelings of the writer, who, because he could not bag the birds straightway, proceeded to abuse them. No case; abuse the plaintiff's counsel.

The writer goes on as follows: "As soon as they are disturbed they commence running, to the annoyance of yourself and the prejudice of your dog, and will not rise till they are out of reach."

And pray, do not gray partridges do the same occasionally?

Then we get the cream of it in the following: "They afford much the best sport in snowy weather when their running is impeded, so they soon get dead beat, and are easily bagged."

Well, that may be sport in the writer's estimation, but I cannot see any sport in pursuing birds in snowy weather, and running them to a standstill!

Then driving the birds is extolled, and is recommended as an easy way of bagging the birds. So it is, too easy, and I don't call it sport.

But the richest part of the chapter is contained in the concluding sentence: "The birds are not at all bad eating, and they afford plenty of amusement and sport when the other shooting is virtually over, so that they should not, on the whole, be so much despised as they appear to be."

I believe nobody ever detested these birds more than the writer himself, to judge from what fell from his pen; therefore his friendly advice comes rather queerly upon his readers.

Now I say that redlegs give more sport in every way than grays. First of all, then, there is not a particle of sameness in shooting them, whereas there is a deal of it in shooting grays. He who is capable of walking without any extra beating of his heart to the stand of his dogs on gray partridges, will bag fifty brace of them, if he has the chance, in almost the same manner. He walks up to the dogs. Birr! rises the covey. Bang! Bang! there you are! It is always and ever the same thing.

But with redlegs comes a change. You are staring at some Roman remains of fortifications. Crack! up gets a redleg, almost under your nose, and dives into a hollow of the lane, before you have had time to recollect yourself.

Or, you are trudging along a bit of copse where you do not expect to meet a bird, as everything seems as bare as a billiard-table, and lo! from around your very gaiters a lot of reds get up, and get away too, scaring you almost out of your boots.

I have seen a red partridge deliberately entering an old quarry, diving into it, like Captain Webb taking his header for his trip across the Channel. I have seen others going straight up into the air, as though they meant trying Jules Verne's celebrated "Voyage à la Lune."

In fact, even in the field, when they rise in the orthodox way, you do not bag two redlegs in the same manner. One will fly towards you, and pass over you too, in spite of every effort of your beaters to drive it "t'other way." Others will fly across—and can't they fly too! As for those which make up their mind to go right away, it takes good powder, and a good man behind the gun, to reach them in time, for their steam is soon up, and they always go "express."

Bless the birds! I like them precisely for these vagaries of theirs.

As to the actual bagging, one does, in sober truth, quite as much with one sort of partridge as with the other—in this wise, that when you flush a covey of grays, they nearly invariably all rise together, when you can only decently expect to bag a brace, barring such flukes as will bring a couple down at one shot when birds are crossing one another's line of flight just as you fire. A brace, as a rule, is all a man can depend on, if he can manage that much. With red partridges, on the other hand, it not uncommonly happens that if you turn up suddenly amidst a lot of them

you may, for aught you know, fire seven or eight shots running at as many birds. They rise occasionally one after the other. Sometimes one brace get up together, then a single one follows, and maybe your dog or yourself will have to flush the rest one by one. I once shot ten birds in eleven shots without going more than ten yards either way for each bird. Ask the enthusiastic Norfolk and Suffolk sportsmen what they think of it, and they will tell you that they have quite as good sport with their red birds as other sportsmen in other counties have with their gray ones.

On the day I am writing about the pointers pinned several birds at least a quarter of a mile from us, owing to their having broken fence in pursuit of the scent. They, however, never moved, and we went very peacefully and leisurely towards them, when our six barrels grassed five birds handsomely.

We found several coveys of chirpers, quite young, and had our work cut out to prevent the dogs from destroying them.

We saw about ten coveys of gray partridges, and bagged about a score all told; but I can safely assert that we had a great deal more sport with the reds. We had seven or eight hares besides; so that when evening drew near, when the air grew colder, and the sun began to get near the horizon, our beaters were literally groaning under the weight of the good things our guns had brought to bear on their shoulders.

We came back well knocked up, and at 10 o'clock went to bed, and the whole of the next day we again devoted to a thorough scouring of the fields.

Finally, I returned by train to Yarmouth, and had I accepted the lots of game my two Norfolk friends wished to load me with, I have no doubt I could have supplied the hotel table for a week with reds, grays, and hares.

CHAPTER VI.

SHORE-SHOOTING FROM PURFLEET TO TILBURY.

My earliest recollections of Purfleet were by no means likely to induce me to try that part of the river Thames as a likely spot whereon to enjoy a few hours' sport with the gun, for I well remembered a time when the river bank, from Purfleet to Tilbury, &c., was dotted with gunners, and when the peppering at anything that flew by was of the most unmerciful description.

That was before the Gun Licence Act was passed. But now—as regards Purfleet at least—there is a very considerable improvement in the general aspect of things, and to those of my readers who may wish to spend a rough day by the water-side, and have some little shooting withal, to keep their minds and bodies occupied, I will say, read the subjoined narrative of my own experience of fun there, then go and try it yourself, and may you meet there with as much success as we experienced ourselves.

Anyone travelling from Fenchurch Street station to Tilbury must have been struck, as he was being whirled along, with the numerous marshes that abound near the line and along the river. These marshes are private property, and as such are, it is to be presumed, reserved. They of course afford shelter and food to many birds of different

species, and of these birds the shore gunners may occasionally glean a good bag, for most of the birds must, at some time or other, pass over the banks, on their way from shore to shore; and in winter time I daresay it must be a very good spot indeed, judging from what a summer day brought forth to our guns. Now, friendly reader, I will tell you what we did, and with that I will leave you to judge whether a trip to Purfleet might prove, or not, an amusing one to yourself.

A friend of mine, whilst sailing his yacht back to her moorings at Erith, had repeatedly noticed many birds along the shore and over the bank from Tilbury to Purfleet, and higher up the river. Thereupon, "Some fine day, when you have nothing to do," he said to me, "you ought to come down with a gun, just for the fun of the thing."

I at once ascertained the hours of departure of the trains, and he agreed to meet me near the Purfleet training-ship, at 9 A.M., on a certain day in August. Punctual to the minute, I arrived with a mutual friend (a good shot too), and two minutes' walk brought us to the shore.

Our friend's dingey was there, safe enough, but no one was in it or near it. A boy, however, soon enlightened us on that point.

"The man as was in the boat," he remarked to us, "has just gone to the tap-room at the hotel, and," looking round, "there he is, coming back now."

Then Cook made his appearance, pulled his forelock with a broad grin, wished us good-morning, and said he was to take us to Erith on board to breakfast with his master. We then all got into the boat, dog and all, sailed over, had our meal comfortably, and came back at about 10.30, ready for any amount of exertion.

The day was lovely in the extreme. There was a

dazzling sun, lighting here and there the pretty Essex and Kent landscapes with its floods and rays of light; the wind was dead on shore, but was not rough, so that so far things were in our favour; the tide was flowing fast, and would be high in an hour or so. We were therefore bound to see the best of the bank, as regarded sheltering shore birds anyhow.

We began operations very soon after landing. About a couple of hundred yards from the training ship, on our way towards Grays, as we were trudging along under the lee of the bank, enjoying mightily the warmth and the sunshine and the thick grass under our feet, so different from the hard London pavements, what should we see but three wood-pigeons coming down our way from over the hill. Quoth my friend:

"Let's squat; we may have a chance."

I signed to Rover. He dropped quietly where he was, and we knelt in the rank grass without daring so much as to wink, for fear of frightening away the birds. The said birds were very high, and circled broad; finally they flew over the Thames, and we climbed the bank quietly, and peeped over, to keep a watch over their evolutions. Presently:

"They are coming back, by Jove!" we simultaneously exclaimed, and we slid back down the sea wall and got ready. The first bird passed close enough, about fifty yards on my left. I fired, missed; fired again, hit him; but he flew on and on, and finally fell near the railway line.

Meanwhile the two others had swerved on the reports, and, though they were both fired at by my friend, not one of them thought fit to remain with us.

I left my gun on the bank, and went a long round to find some means of crossing the wide ditch that separated me

from the field where my wood-pigeon had settled, and by good luck I discovered a pole in the grass. Over I went, and when I reached the spot where I had marked the bird I found it there with a broken wing. He wanted to go a little farther and give me a run; but Rover did not see it in the same light, and, twisting its neck, I put an end to its troubles. I came back the same way, but the dog went sniffing a little everywhere, according to the wont of those little busy-body spaniels, and lo! out of a ditch came a teal. I had no gun, and at first I looked on in regret; but when I saw the teal, by good chance, going towards the bank, I called out vociferously; my friend turned back just in the nick of time, took in the case at a glance, and bundled the teal clean over on the mud on the other side of the sea wall.

"Hit him?" I called out, when I saw that he did not fire again.

"Yes," said he, evidently very pleased with himself.

"That is all right!" and I felt as happy as if I had shot it myself. After all, there is quite as much charm in seeing someone shoot as if you were shooting yourself.

We picked up the teal and went on. After about a quarter of an hour's walk I heard some ox-birds whistling. I looked over to watch their flight, and presently I saw them all settle on a piece of soft mud, near a bend of the bank.

"Come along!" I signed to my friend; and, with an angry gesture to the dog to keep him to heel, we all started at a run, under the friendly shelter of the wall. Presently we reach the spot.

"They are over there!" I point silently to my companion; and as we thrust our hats down on our heads we laugh, and a pleased light dances in our eyes. We then go up slowly, and when we reach the top the birds are nowhere to be seen.

"They have gone!" exclaims my friend, despondingly, when—whistle, whistle—three of the birds seemed to spring forth from the bowels of the earth, and they start at three different tangents. For a moment it looked, for all the world, as if there were thirty of them, they multiplied themselves in so incredible a fashion; being here, there, and everywhere at the same time seemingly. Under such circumstances it takes luck to kill, and "Only one" was the verdict, when the smoke of our four barrels had been blown away and allowed us to see what had taken place. Well, there was our bird drifting up with the tide, and the dog barking at it; but, as usual, he would not go into the water to retrieve it. It was therefore fortunate, so far, that we had retained Cook's services. That worthy, who kept cruising about in sight of us in the small boat, soon saw that his help was needed, and he was on the bird in a jiffey. He took it up and went off again, keeping well away from our shore, so as not to interfere with our shooting. By that time we were pretty nearly half way to the Point; and when we came to the salt marsh there, we agreed that it would be well for one of us at least to walk over it, as ox-birds or a sandpiper or two might have been thereabouts. I undertook the job, and went down. There was a small space of green sward (about ten yards square) that had been removed, by spadefuls, as far as I could judge, close to the wall. What it had been cut away for I do not know; but it had left a sort of rectangular shallow hole, where, in the deepest parts, was some water. Of course the whole was soft and muddy; and over it several small birds, wagtails particularly, were disporting themselves, much to my amusement; for these birds look very pretty, and they are so quick and so sharp in their evolutions. Well, I was there, with my gun on my arm, looking on, and my friend on the wall was

exchanging remarks with me, so that we were talking quite loudly, when suddenly from the mud rose a sandpiper whose presence I had not observed, but who evidently must have noticed us and not minded our presence. We were so astonished that ere we could bring our guns to shoulder he had popped over the wall and was gone.

"Did you ever?" exclaimed my friend, with blank astonishment.

"Yes, I have," I retorted laughing. "I have had the same trick played me over and over again. I cannot for the life of me understand how such shy birds, as ox-birds and sandpipers generally are, will occasionally allow someone to get quite close to them in the open, and with nothing whatsoever to hide you from them. It passes my comprehension."

"Well," he said, "I could not have believed it had I not seen it. Anyhow, we have lost him, have we not? And oh we *did* look so foolish!"

I daresay we did.

Close to where we were some men were at work building a landing stage against the wall. These men, or at least one of them, owned a large black retriever, which gave us quite a turn, for, as we were quietly discussing matters, the infernal brute rushed towards us, open mouthed and furiously showing its teeth, and I believe would have worried us had we not had our guns. We kept it at arms' length with the barrels for a moment or so, but as it would not desist and the affair might have ended seriously, I had made up my mind to blow its head off at its next rush at me, when at last its master called it away. I think that people who own such ferocious brutes ought to keep them chained, and, if not, anyone whom they attack ought to be empowered to destroy them.

When the dog had gone back we ventured to go our way. My friend soon after missed a bird with both barrels, and thereupon he laid the blame of the mishap on the upset of his nerves which the retriever's attack had brought about. However, we laughed it over; and, seeing that Rover was very busy in the ditch, we kept our eyes on him from time to time, and when we arrived at the sluice, near Grays, he flushed near the bridge a small bird, which we at once recognised. It was a sandpiper. I fired, and shot it. On the report, a second sandpiper rose. I fired my second barrel and my friend fired his first. We missed, but his second brought it down, at a goodish range.

A little farther, close to the little quaint church at Grays, a jack-snipe was flushed by the dog, and we both fired and missed, but it was fully sixty yards from us; and so there was nothing extraordinary in not hitting such a small bird at that distance, with the wind dead on the shot, and the numerous gyrations of the bird to contend against.

When the jack had disappeared somewhere in the clouds, after his startling adventure, we sat down on the wall to enjoy the panorama which was there before us, and I have rarely seen a prettier picture anywhere. What an amount of traffic! What industry! If ever anyone wishes to drive away all thoughts of idleness from his mind, he ought to watch the river when a favourable wind and tide bring up all the weather-bounds from below towards the port of London; and the sight of all this earnest hurry and steady work will shame his idleness away from him. If it does not, it ought to, and that amounts to the same.

At Grays we tried to get some refreshments, but none were to be had, except bread and cheese and beer. We then went along the road until we had passed Grays, and resumed sport on the wall towards Tilbury. We

saw about fifty shore birds; ox-birds by twos and threes and fours, or more; sandpipers singly; starlings in shoals; seagulls in tribes; wood-pigeons came by the score, but were very shy, and we did not shoot any more of them.

Opposite Rosherville I shot a ringplover, and when we came back on our footsteps we had about thirty birds of all sorts. We walked back very leisurely, the tide was then going down fast, and the shore birds increased in number as the mud flats increased in extent. Howbeit, so far we had shot but two or three presentable birds, I mean in size; but of course we had not expected anything better. Everybody knows that on a river bank, where anyone with a gun licence can shoot, it is not likely that one would meet with plenty of large birds. We were aware of that, and had made the most of our outing—*sur ses propres mérites*—and, taken all in all, we had enjoyed ourselves so thoroughly that we agreed to come again some other day. Well, we had stopped behind the wall to enjoy the afternoon sun and watch for birds, about half a mile from the Purfleet training ship, when, whilst talking with my companion, I saw two ducks a mile away coming towards us, from Grays. I thought I had made a mistake at first, but a squint through my Dollond convinced me that there was no deception about it. I hurriedly got down the wall, and my friend followed suit when he had caught sight of the new comers. We stopped at the ditch and crouched behind two bushes, about two or three yards apart, keeping the dog well down all the while. The two ducks came straight along the wall and passed exactly over our heads. Four barrels fired, and the second duck is evidently going down. The first one thereupon turns towards it, and when the wounded bird breaks his fall with outstretched wings, and flops on the water, the "leader"

settles, too, near it. Of course we have rushed up the bank to see how the wounded bird would get on and what he would do, and we have seen the whole affair. Cook has also seen it, and is rowing desperately towards the two birds, who are now heading the tide some two hundred yards from us. But when the man gets about a hundred yards from the ducks the leader thinks it is high time to shift his quarters, and he gets up, then looks back, and is evidently surprised at his companion remaining there, for he at first flies in a semicircle, and actually passes within thirty yards of Cook in his boat, so that if Cook had had a gun, or one of us had been with him, that "leader" would have stood a good chance of coming into the bag. However, after a short circle, he headed for Kent, and we lost sight of him. Of course, if we had allowed the other duck to remain on the water there was every probability that he would have come again to it; but I did not fancy the idea of leaving a wounded bird there to suffer, on the chance of the other one turning up to keep it company, so I signed to Cook to pick it up; but that worthy, though he tried hard, could not do it. The duck dived and evaded him repeatedly. I then called him ashore, we jumped in the dingey with him, and he rowed us towards the bird, when a well-directed shot from my friend settled it for ever.

Whilst we were in the boat five herons passed in a line, about fifty yards over the bank, towards Rainham. A man who was in ambush there fired, and I believe got one. We, however, were getting somewhat tired, and did not care about landing any more. We went to Erith, had a glass there with the owner of the yacht, gave Cook half-a-crown for his civility and attention, and went back to the station at Purfleet, where we arrived just in time for a train to town.

Chemin faisant, when about half way over the river, we shot a gray plover, and that concluded our trip.

Now, I do not pretend for a moment that our trip was anything that would please a man *blasé* in matters of sport; but what I certainly claim for it is the novelty of the thing, the variety of the fun, and the rough-and-ready fashion in which it must be conducted. These were not without their charm, and if any of my readers think from my narrative that they would enjoy a similar trip, let them by all means try it. The expenses are small, the fun varied, and a pleasant day may be spent at Purfleet.

(P.S. Since the above was written, "a change has come over the scene." Some limeworks and a tramway have made their appearance between Purfleet and Grays, and thus a good bit of the shore is now entirely ruined for shooters.)

CHAPTER VII.

PHEASANT-SHOOTING IN SURREY.

TWO of us, by appointment, met at Waterloo, and travelled together to meet the party. At the country station a porter, evidently on the look-out for us, asked us if we were going to the woods, and on our answering in the affirmative, he told us that the dog-cart was waiting for us outside. He then assisted us with our gun-boxes, &c., and we were soon under weigh.

When on the railway bridge, going up the hill, we looked about us from our exalted positions, and it was with dismay we perceived that some of the coverts in the distance were as yet wearing their summer garb.

Quoth the major, biting his moustache: "Leaves confoundedly thick, my boy, eh?"

"Awful!" I replied with a groan; and certainly we felt very doubtful as to our ultimate success in sport, and our remarks on the point were anything but lively. However, I always put on a cheerful countenance, and I tried to make my companion see things a little more *couleur de rose.*

At the keeper's we were received with enthusiasm by our host, his brother, and a Cambridge undergraduate. The fact was they were at breakfast, and the good things spread before them had exhilarated their spirits; and we

fell to, ditto, with a will. Our early start from town, our railway journey, and last but not least, our five or six-mile drive from the station to the woods, had singularly sharpened our appetites, and we did honour to the feed.

At 10 o'clock we got ready, and the head-keeper marshalled our beaters in the lane by his cottage. The spaniels, four in number, were led by the under-keeper, and we went down the lane to the next copse; that round the keeper's house being somewhat tabooed, as he feeds his birds there.

At the lower gate we assumed our positions; our host taking the left wing, with Jones the head-keeper on his left-hand side, and a beater on his right. I came next, and another beater intervened between the major and me. Finally a beater, the undergraduate, another beater, our host's brother, and the under-keeper completed the array —about a dozen men all told, and four dogs, good ones. It certainly looked long odds on the woods being well scoured.

"Ready?" inquired the owner. "Right! then let us go on."

And we went on, the dogs were slipped, the beaters began belabouring the bushes and under-coverts, and, with our guns ready, the fray began. The leaves, be it said, were still thick, as we had indeed feared, but not quite so thick as we had been led to expect. The ground, however, was literally covered with ferns in some places, and then rabbits were rather safer there than we liked. "Mark pheasant!" called out Jones. The bird rose grandly between my host and me, and he brought it to book by a splendid shot.

"First blood!" said he, in great glee.

"Rabbit to you, sir," said my right-hand beater. I

turned round, lost sight of bunny, looked ahead, could not see him. "There he goes!" shouts my left-hand man. I fire—miss. The rabbit turns at a right angle down the path, and there my Schultze cartridge settles him, a long shot.

Meanwhile the major had been firing too, and the captain (our host's brother) had joined him on a brace of pheasants, both of which came to grief, the undergraduate explaining that he could not see them—hence his not firing. As we advance the birds are picked up, and one of my men collars my rabbit.

"Be you ready, sir?" he then asks me.

"Rather," I said emphatically.

And he brings down his cudgel like a flail on a small brambly bush, out of which rise a magnificent cock and hen.

"Spare the hen, please," shouts the owner. "Of course," I return mentally; and bang! The cock shuts off steam, folds his wings, drops his legs, and comes down head first; the poor hen hurrying on, like fun, to get out of any possible danger to herself. We were then in a bright bit of clear ground, where the rabbits were easily followed, and we bundled over about half a dozen within a hundred yards. The dogs were extremely well broken. Not one of them ever "said a word" to either bird or bunny, and none of them chased. A rare treat this.

We went down the brook to seek for any woodcocks that might have been about; but the season, methinks, was too early for those long-billed individuals, for we did not see one. *En revanche*, we were amply repaid by meeting over a dozen long-tails, which the dogs cleverly set about unrooting. The sun was shining through the tree-tops on to the yellow and green mossy carpet below, and its rays

through the briers and brambles which partly covered the brook looked, when they reached the water, like so many bars of silver and gold and blue. Out of this mixture, imagine pheasant after pheasant rising in their glory, with their emerald-red-blue heads and necks and their motley garbs, and you will acknowledge that the sight was very pretty. There is nothing more grand to my mind than such scenes under covert; and whilst shooting the birds I thought it almost a pity to kill such handsome things. There were also a few rabbits lying along the high banks of the brook; but the vast majority of them escaped scot free, as the covert was very thick. When we neared the end of the wood, and when we were as yet fully a hundred and fifty yards from the corner, it was deemed advisable that the guns should go outside and take their stand there, whilst the men would thoroughly beat the intervening bit of covert. We accordingly stopped the beaters, and told them to wait where they were until we gave them a signal to proceed. We then went back and took to the road. At the corner we arranged ourselves in such a way as to clip anything that would come out of the wood, and forthwith the keeper called to the men to come forward and to let go the spaniels. Meanwhile a couple of traps that happened to be driving by at the time were stopped on the road, in order to allow their occupants to see the fun; moreover several farm labourers also congregated from the neighbouring fields, and we had quite a "gallery" when the fun began.

The beaters, under covert, had scarcely received the order to proceed than several of them called out to "mark pheasant," and "rabbit forward."

The captain, whose face I could just catch at the bend, suddenly stepped back, and signed to me, calling out meanwhile:

"Look out! there is a bird running along the hedge towards you."

I looked and saw him coming. He ran along the fence with a tremendous "waddle," like a fat old woman, and his tail was gingerly kept up out of the way of brambles, &c.

"Now, my fine fellow," I thought, "what are you going to do, I should like to know?" He seemed quite as much at a loss to decide as I was to guess; but the beaters just then shouting all together, he got up within ten yards of me, swept out of the fence, and went over my left in full sail—an easy shot which I could not have missed had I tried. On turning round I saw another bird coming towards me amongst the trees; and, waiting until he was well up for fear of hitting any of the men, I gave him my second barrel as a *bonne bouche*, and he came crashing through the branches and leaves to the ground quite dead.

The men were then in the thickest part of the covert, and quite close to us, and the firing was quite exhilarating. The Cambridge man greatly distinguished himself there, and for a time the major himself gave up grumbling, fired away, and, when all was over, wished "a thousand birds had been there." Well, I did not quite agree with him there, and I am sure that, had he had a thousand shots to fire without moving from his place, he would very speedily have got sick of the affair. There is no charm in any continuous firing. As shooting practice it may be accepted, but there would be no sport in it. In fact, seeking for game constitutes the sport of shooting; and although one may occasionally enjoy firing several shots without moving —as when a bit of covert, impenetrable to the shooters, is driven by the beaters in order to get the birds out—yet I contend that if all covert-shooting were to be carried on in the same manner, I, for one, would fail to perceive where

was the sport of the thing. It is at first excellent fun, and where the guns cannot possibly shoot it is perfectly admissible, especially when the neighbouring lands are tabooed, as they were in our case. In fact, it was quite intoxicating in its way. The hurry of the thing, the noise, the unexpected shots that turned up, were, for the time being, very entertaining.

When the men came out we had eight pheasants and five rabbits to pick up; not bad, in point of numbers, this, for five minutes' work. The first pheasant I had shot had dropped on the other side of the road, and the keeper went there with his retriever—an animal in which he seemed to place great confidence, but the greatest muff I have ever seen, even amongst retrievers proper. This sporting (?) dog was black (of course), and he was fifteen yards long, more or less, or at least appeared so when he took his uncouth canters. He had, moreover, as much nose as a coal-scuttle, and seemingly would not have scented an ostrich if it had been on the other side of the hedge. However, he galloped for a quarter of a mile or so about the field, and the keeper thereupon declared that my bird must have been a runner, and must have gone.

"A runner!" I exclaimed, disgusted. "Do you think I don't know a dead bird when I see one coming down? The bird, I bet, is within ten yards of the hedge. Get your hippopotamus out of the way and see how quickly the spaniels will find out my bird."

In short it was quite amusing, for no sooner were the little dogs brought on than the four of them went at once to the bird and stood round it, sniffing it. After that, hippopotamus's laurels looked anything but green; but really I have no patience with such nonsense. The idea of training a certain set of dogs, which by nature were

intended, perhaps, to pick up firewood or draw a sledge, into sporting dogs, has something in it which invariably makes me wonder, with, I consider, very excellent ground for wondering. Hippopotamus, for one, would make an excellent night cab-horse; but no amount of tuition and lickings will give him what he needs—*i.e.* a sporting nose.

At luncheon-time the question of covert-shooting as practised now and as it was carried on by our ancestors was mooted around our table, and we discussed with warmth the advantages and disadvantages of working with "mute" or "babbling" dogs. I confess I like a spaniel to give some sort of warning when he springs his quarry, although I should have no wish to see it carried to the extent to which the poet speaks in his lines:

> See how with emulative zeal they strive,
> Thread the loose sedge, and through the thicket drive!
> No babbling voice the bosom falsely warms,
> Or swells the panting heart with vain alarms;
> Till all at once their choral tongues proclaim
> The secret refuge of the lurking game.

A wood-spaniel now that babbles is considered "bad form." Certainly those that give tongue to such an extent as to make their "choral tongues proclaim the secret refuge of the lurking game" are inadmissible, and yet in thick covert some vocal sound indicating finding is very desirable. Howbeit, in the aforesaid poet's times, evidently, covert-shooting was bird-hunting on a small scale, for does he not add:

> Soon as the ready dogs their quarry spring,
> And swift he spreads his variegated wing,
> Ceased is their cry?

Therefore the dogs gave tongue on the birds' tracks until they sprang them; and no doubt it must have been an exciting way of pursuing the sport. But, *tels temps, telles*

mœurs, we have changed all that; and now most people, when they beat their coverts, display just as much excitement as when taking tea. It is "bad form" to get excited now, and when a dog "the sportsman's bosom warms, and swells his panting heart with alarms," that dog is voted forthwith a confounded nuisance and a bother, for nobody now likes to have his blood coursing through his veins at a greater rate than the orthodox sixty pulsations per minute; and as to getting excited in any way, some sportsmen's faces nowadays are perfectly impenetrable masks of stolidness. They neither smile nor laugh, but go on their way with the precision and inscrutability of a mowing-machine; but that is no improvement. I like a man to be a man—at least in sport; and shooting a covert is not exactly as serious an undertaking as settling the Eastern Question; therefore why look so solemn? Ay, why? No, taken all in all, I think our ancestors were by far better sportsmen than we are, inasmuch that they appreciated to the full all the incidental pleasures of shooting, whereas we seem to be growing ashamed of them.

After luncheon we went to another wood, about a quarter of a mile from the lodge. The weather was not so bright as it had been all the morning, and now and then a few drops of rain fell; but we had done so well already that a little rain was not likely to daunt us, and it was with renewed spirit that we entered the new covert.

Our beaters did not work well for a time. They had indulged, I strongly suspect, in some potations deep and strong during the interval of our luncheon, and the consequence was that half of them were "heavy." Howbeit a good blow-up directed to one of them made the lot look alive, and soon they resumed their wonted energies.

Now I have very frequently observed that when rain is

about to fall the pheasants do not remain scattered, as they are apt to do when the weather is fine and warm; on the contrary, they assemble, as a rule, in little knots—in sporting parlance denominated "nides." Now on the day of which I am speaking, we found, from the dogs' behaviour, that the birds had done a good deal of tramping, for repeatedly the spaniels took up lines and followed them. Moreover, we were several times at least a quarter of an hour beating about without finding a single bird. Plenty of rabbits, however, made a diversion to the sport.

"Where, in the name of all that is good, Jones, are the birds?" at last queried my host.

"Dunno, sir," said the keeper, somewhat crestfallen at the jeers of the major, who for the last ten minutes had been bothering everybody, purposely, with his queries as to when he would have another shot at a long-tail.

I said nothing, but guessed we would have warm work in store when nearing the fence, as evidently we were driving the birds before us; and this indeed turned out to be the case. We had only half-a-dozen birds clear during that beat; but when we pitched our tents in the lane, and the intervening space was beaten, great was the slaughter, as the birds were flushed by threes and fours at a time. Some of these, however, broke back, and flew over the beaters towards the ground we had left, but the majority took heart of grace, and faced our fire grandly. I performed two doubles in the midst of the *déroute*; the captain killed five birds and a rabbit; the major had three birds and two rabbits; the owner a brace of each; and the Cambridge man rattled away cleverly at two birds and surely five or six rabbits.

By-the-way, "Hippopotamus" was excellent on rabbits—he retrieved them all, and killed one or two under covert

that had not been shot at. The strong scent of the vermin suited his hippopotamusship, I suppose; and I have no doubt that when old Jones wants a couple of rabbits for his dinner he has but to take a short walk into the woods with his long-legged and long-bodied nigger, and the said nigger will soon nab the requisite number of bunnies, without a single shot being needed; and that is very handy.

Well, we went on bravely at it until 4.30 P.M., when we really could do no more, and, wearily enough, we retraced our footsteps towards the lodge.

We were but little short of a hundred pheasants, and of rabbits we had about a cartload. We had therefore experienced very fair sport, notwithstanding the early season. We saw only very few backward birds, although the keeper asserted that several lots he knew of were about. As for rabbits, I have never known them to be more numerous, and when a few frosts will have cleared the undergrowth of fern leaves and other such rubbish, great will be the fun at the bunnies in the woods. Three of us used the Schultze powder, to our utmost satisfaction; and there is no doubt that for shooting under covert it has a very great advantage over the black powders, inasmuch that it only produces a thin smoke which does not hang before one's eyes, thus enabling the shooter to place his second barrel, whenever needed, without any impediment in the way.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WESTERN SHORE OF CANVEY ISLAND.

CANVEY Island, as most people know, is situated on the Essex shore of the river Thames; but what most people do not know is that there is excellent shore-shooting to be had there.

There are some folks who assert that shore-shooting, being a sport amongst sea-birds, and not calculated to fill the game-bag with dainties, ought not to be considered as sport, and they turn up their noses at it and at its votaries. I suppose such men cannot have any soul for fox-hunting then since there is nothing to take home to eat when the fox is killed. Such a style of reasoning is absurd. I contend that shore-shooting is a most pleasant sport, taking the shooter to queer, wild, out-of-the-way spots, and putting him to all sorts of shifts and expedients; and then it is available to all, and that is more than can be said of game-shooting. I spent one of the most charming days I ever enjoyed with the gun, on the western shore of Canvey Island. I fired about eighty shots, brought home twenty-one fine birds, had all sorts of pleasurable incidents to enliven the time, and would not have changed my *venue* for the "warmest corner" in the three kingdoms. Let any sportsman at heart read the following, and if he does not agree

with me that mine was a most enjoyable sport I shall be disappointed.

When the train lands its passengers at Benfleet, in front of the station may be observed what, at first sight, seems to be wholly a marsh, extending for many miles until it reaches the shore of the Thames. Within a stone's-throw of the railway line, a broad sheet of water at high tide—or a narrow one, lined with mud, at low tide—separates the mainland from the marshy-looking island. It is not wholly a marsh though; and in some parts of the island several comfortable-looking homesteads and a few stacks are to be seen above the sea-banks. On the mud, in the creek, sit two or three old smacks and a barge or two, and below, in stormy weather, some shrimpers usually run in for shelter, making the creek rather lively.

There are two ways of doing justice to the shore-shooting round the island. One consists in sailing or rowing up the creeks with the tide, and dropping out with it, when some excellent bags can be made; the shooter has only to sit forward, gun in hand, ready to fire at the shortest notice. He must, however, take care to provide himself with mud-pattens, so as to land at any time. At high tide, a suitable spot can always be picked out, and if the boat be run in-shore, one has only to step overboard on the green sward. A stranger to the island will do well to secure the services of a boatman who knows the place, as, when the tide has sufficiently risen to cover the saltings, it is not easy to keep the boat in mid-channel, and there is nothing to show where it is when the whole is being overflowed.

The second way consists simply in tramping by the sea-walls.

The sea-wall on the western shore zigzags in an extraordinary manner, so much so that sometimes after

walking a quarter of a mile you find yourself opposite the very place where you had previously had a shot. Nothing could be better devised in order to insure good sport. Were the sea-wall perfectly straight it would be almost impossible to overreach the birds without severe tramping, because if the sportsman could see the birds a long way off the same would hold good for the birds seeing the sportsman; whereas with these short cuts one has always a chance of popping on some birds totally unaware of your presence, and behind each new bend something may be expected to turn up.

The first thing to be done in beating a salt-marsh of this sort is to observe from which quarter the wind blows, and to try to keep under the wind, for it is astonishing how restless the birds become if a man gives them the benefit of his scent, however far away he may be. On the day of my excursion, as I stood on the railway platform facing the island, the breeze came from the left, *i.e.* eastwards; therefore my best plan was to take the right bank, and I made my way round by the church and then under the railway bridge. I then loaded my gun and went ahead, getting my field-glass ready, and my man following leisurely with the game-bag and the rest of my ammunition.

Never walk with your bag-bearer when out shore-shooting. Talking is sure to follow, and few things disturb a shore more than the human voice. For the same reason a dog, unless he obeys signs, is a nuisance. As regards retrieving the birds when they fall in the water, nothing is more simple if one has started down wind, as it will be sure to blow the birds ashore, and a little waiting will secure them.

When we stood on the sea-wall ready to begin, the tide was coming up still, and had about an hour more to run—

just the right time for sport, as of course at high tide the birds must perforce settle near the walls, and thereby give a chance to the gunners. My first shots were at lapwings. There was a flock of them in the ploughed field between the railway line and the creek. I crept behind the wall when they rose, my man stopped motionless where he was, and the birds began their many evolutions, passing and repassing over the line and tumbling about in a lively style. Presently they wheeled my way, and passed overhead at a great height. Two or three stragglers, however, were bringing up the rear, and one of these coming lower with his tumbling I fired, hit him, redoubled the dose, and he tumbled down for good. The others turned back, and, giving me no chance, returned inland, and I went on, soon afterwards passing some magazines dug up in the hillside.

About a quarter of a mile farther, a covey of partridges got up from a field on the right of the bank. I was looking at them when I heard some shanks whistling. I cautiously peeped over, but could see nothing, so walked nearer to the bend and got up again, when two redshanks rose. Fired at one, missed him; fired again and winged him. He fell in the creek, and the wind brought him ashore. A moment after I saw a heron rising from the fields about half a mile away; he flew majestically towards the bank, and disappeared behind it. I reconnoitred with my Dollond, but the bends of the wall were so numerous that I could not note the exact spot where he had settled. I went down, then, loaded with two hard-driving cartridges, marked the spot where I had seen the bird go over by the remains of a stile sticking up in the wall, and I went towards the spot as quick as my legs could carry me, without running though, for I have, ere this, found out that running and

shooting are not compatible. Reaching the spot, I go up quietly, and there is my bird on the other side, too far, being fully a hundred yards away. I am deliberating whether a long shot might not be tried, when to my astonishment five herons get up from my side within five yards of me. Bang, bang! The first thrusts out his head, neck, and legs, and comes down flop; the second hangs his legs and lifts up his head, fluttering energetically, but comes down gradually, and finally lands on the salting, within sixty yards, when he begins to run. This, however, availed him nothing, the wall preventing him from seeing me and from thwarting my approach, when I settled him with another shot. Both birds were in superb plumage. The last one was a very old bird, and nearly twice as long as the other, who seemed one of the year's breed. Both will do well for my collection, for I have had for a long time a desire to secure every shore bird in the islands, and I hope shortly to produce such a collection as will amuse and entertain the public.

We packed up both birds carefully, and my man was just slinging the bag on his shoulders when a whacking hare got up from our very feet and ran into the fields. We followed her by sight, and in her run she disturbed another hare, so that fur seems to be pretty plentiful about there.

We walked on about a mile without any further incident, when, at a bare "soft," we perceived a curlew feeding with several ring-plovers. Now, I have read somewhere that shooting seven curlews is considered very fair work for a sportsman's lifetime. Why, I am at a loss to understand, as I have shot hundreds myself, and this one was added to the list. Some people affect to despise curlews, but then their cooks are to blame for it. A curlew, properly prepared,

makes a delicious dish, and our ancestors knew that full well :

> A curlew, be she white or be she black,
> She carries twelvepence on her back.

Now twelve pence in olden times were worth a great deal more than our modern shilling, and therefore the bird must have been held in very high esteem. The one I had spied was a very good one in more ways than one. He allowed me to get within twenty yards of him, and then came down as quickly as he got up. With my second barrel I missed one of the ring-plovers. We then stopped for refreshments.

The weather was beautiful, but fearfully hot, in spite of the welcome breeze, and a more lovely day for an excursion could not have been had. The tide was on the turn, and some of the saltings began to reappear, when thousands upon thousands of starlings turned up to feed on them.

During our meal a flock of gray plovers passed over the marsh, and many turned across the creek, when I got two.

Our lunch at an end, we resumed our tramp. I got on the wall with my field-glass and scanned the shores as far as I could. There were two herons about a mile off, by the stream, and that was all I could see.

We started towards them, when I heard a curlew calling. Looking up I saw two flying over the creek about seventy yards away from us. I fired, and one of them dropped one of his legs. I redoubled the dose, but without apparent effect, as the birds went on.

"Very queer, that!" I thought; but the mystery was solved soon after, for we came up again with the wounded bird, and a rattling shot settled him.

Meanwhile at my first shot, as might have been expected, the herons had gone; but what disgusted me most was that, at the very next bend past the spot where I had

originally fired, were three more herons, which of course I had not seen, as they were behind the bank. We were then walking past one of the farmhouses, and the tide receding very fast most of the marsh was bare, and the birds once more masters of the situation. The channel became lower and farther away from the wall, and long-range now became the order of the day. There were, however, only small shore birds about, and these were not worth shooting when they were over the creek, on account of the "softs," which precluded any attempt at picking them up when shot.

When evening drew near the concerts of "calls" and "whistles" were something worth hearing. Plovers, oxbirds, sandpipers, curlews, herons, peewits, were all over the marsh; and we found that as the darkness increased they became a great deal more reckless, thus enabling me to reach over a score of birds for the day's sport.

I was delighted to find that such excellent sport was to be had so near town, and heartily recommend the same trip to any intending shore-shooter.

CHAPTER IX.

THE EASTERN SHORE OF CANVEY ISLAND.

UP at 7 A.M. Wind N.E. Weather "beastly" cold. Previous day's reports in the papers had announced snow in the provinces. For a shore-shooting trip, therefore, nothing could be better; and I accordingly donned my shooting toggery, got the dog up, sent for a cab, and at 7.50 we were in the train, bound for the Essex marshes.

By the time we reached Rainham we found the fields quite clothed in their winter garb, and the farther we went the thicker appeared the white covering. A friend had met me at Fenchurch Street station, and we both rubbed our hands in ecstasy at the prospect before us. We intended inspecting the eastern shore of Canvey Island; and I may premise that that shore of the island is by far the best as regards beating creeks, &c., because the saltings are there very wide—indeed in some places they are half a mile or more; and it stands to reason that birds will pitch in the creeks in the midst of such a vast extent of ground with a feeling of security which they cannot experience on the narrow western shore.

In short, on the latter you have nothing to do but to keep walking behind the bank and popping occasionally over the wall whenever you have happened to mark birds

settling down. On the western shore, remaining behind the bank would be perfectly useless, as the creeks are far away from the sea-banks; and therefore the birds, to be had, must be sought for, with a deal of tramping, creek-crossing, &c.

I prefer the latter style, as a good deal of "unexpected" springs up occasionally; and the style of shooting, as regards the tramping, is exactly like snipe-shooting in an ordinary marsh, until one reaches the creeks, when the dog must be got to heel, so that a thorough inspection may be made of the bare flats.

We used choke-bored guns and Schultze cartridges, with No. 2 shot in the left barrel, and No. 6 in the right.

By-the-way it is astonishing what a tremendous range one obtains with a choke-bore loaded with large shot. I had, of course, tried these loads before, but I had never seen their effects so distinctly as I did on that day, simply because over the mud one sees the range of the charge so clearly that there can be no mistake.

On our arrival we found the Benfleet creek pretty full as yet, and when we wended our way to the ferry (some hundred and twenty yards or so from the little station) the prospect was far from cheering to any ordinary eyes. The hills on the left were snow-clad, and the tops of the sea-walls were ditto "chalked." Many small birds, already pinched by the cold, were flying about in search of soft places along the banks; and in the marsh itself we could see several companies on the wing, and sundry curlew and shank calls left no doubt in our minds as to the result of our trip to Benfleet.

We were ferried over, and landed on the muddy road that leads to the homestead. We then clambered up the sea-wall and loaded.

The creek on the left of the wall being as yet impassable, we took matters coolly, and went along at a moderate pace, so as to give the tide time to recede.

Our man, who had gone to one of the inns for some purchase or other, then turned up and followed. We passed the farmhouse, and there being then a tolerably clean bit of salting, we went down with the dog. Whilst we were talking of the possibility of getting a snipe or two, we heard one very high above us, and soon picked it out and stopped to watch it. It flew two or three times up and down, in the face of the bitter cold wind, so that tears ran down our respective faces as we kept our eyes on it. Then we lost sight of it, and became aware that another one was also on the wing, and evidently following the first. The latter we kept in view, and it settled in the marsh a very long way off.

When we reached the whereabouts (we had loaded with snipe-shot whilst on our way thither), I signed to Rover to proceed, and he went here, and there, and everywhere, always keeping an eye on us so as not to be too far from shot, much to my friend's astonishment and pleasure. The spot was partly saltings and partly old withered salt-reeds, with little bits of open soft mud every foot or so, and water a little everywhere. A nicer spot for a snipe to get a breakfast in there was not anywhere near.

"Your little spaniel," said my companion, "works most admirably; and if the birds really did pitch here he is bound to turn them up."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the dog caught scent; he turned to the right, faced the wind, and looked at us.

"Look out!" I whispered to my friend; and dash went the dog, and up went the snipes.

We both fired at the same, and killed it in a desperate manner. I wounded the second, and my friend missed it with his left; but we saw the bird was touched, and made sure to have it. It kept going, however, until it cleared the wall, and we lost sight of it.

"It will be in the ditch," I opined; and we went to look for it.

When we reached the wall I went some twenty yards ahead. My companion remained where he was. Then we got on the wall and sent the dog down. He at once acknowledged the presence of the bird, and kept passing up and down the same spot, sniffing desperately. As the bird would not rise, we went to look for it, and found it in the water, dipping its beak and drowning itself. The water had taken away its scent, so that the dog had been nonplussed for tracking it.

We picked it up, and found both birds in prime fettle and condition, but the first had been smashed by our two barrels.

Well, such things *will* happen occasionally, especially when snipe-shooting; as there is no knowing to which of the shooters the snipe will go when it rises between two men.

We returned to the marsh, and the spaniel worked every inch of it with wonderful attention. In fact that little dog was quite A 1.

When we had crossed a minor creek we were facing the large one—getting somewhat empty then—and hearing some calls of birds, we reconnoitred with the Dollond. They were at the point between two creeks on our right, and we held a council of war.

"One of us, Tom," I stated, "must remain here, and the other must go round and scare the birds. If you stop,

I will go. Remain here as close to the creek as you can, because the birds are sure, in their flight, to follow the water."

"All right," he said; and he ensconced himself in a hole.

I went to the right and sought a passage, but found it blocked. Had to come back on my footsteps and pick out a smaller creek, which I crossed. The birds were feeding still, as we had not heard them call. When I arrived, however, as near to them as I could, so as to have them between my friend and myself, I found that fully a hundred and fifty yards of mud separated me from them. I tried to cross, but the "soft" was decidedly "too soft," and I was deliberating whether I should fire a barrel in the air on the off-chance of the birds bolting in the right direction, when a wood-pigeon coming by settled the case. I fired and killed him, and on the report the birds got up and began flying over the creek. Now for a piece of strategy. I kept my eye on them, and when they swerved and wheeled round to go to sea I fired in their direction, although, mind, they were virtually out of range, but simply to drive them the other way. The shot rattled harmlessly enough on the water, but the desired effect was produced, and the birds passed my friend, who, however, got none—he fired too low. From where I stood I saw the whole performance admirably. Had he held his gun's muzzle just half an inch higher, I verily believe he would have killed four or five birds with each barrel, as the company kept so close together.

"You did your best to help me," said he, when he rejoined me, "and I am very much obliged to you for that shot of yours: but you see the Fates had decreed that those shanks should not as yet come into my bag. But, oh! I

say! Did not they fly fast? There they were, and up they came like a flash of lightning!"

We had to go back to the wall in order to pursue our way, as a large, impassable mud-creek barred our intended road; then we went down again in the marsh, beating well the ground for snipe.

On our way a flock of gray plovers were descried by our man, who shrilly whistled to call our attention. We stopped and stooped, and when the birds passed us at about seventy yards' range, we gave them our four barrels, and got thirteen birds. Had we not had the dog, however, we should certainly have lost at least half of them in the reeds, but he set himself diligently to work, and although he does not bring them to hand, he finds them quickly, and mouths them, so that we always know when he has found anything.

When the plovers were picked up, John, who had come to us on seeing them fall, put them in the game-bag, together with my wood-pigeon and the two snipe, and we then sent him back to the wall, where the walking was fine, and where he could watch for anything coming our way.

About a quarter of a mile off we saw several curlews dropping into a creek, and this time Tom went ahead and a long way round to frighten them towards me; and right well he did it too; but the tramping was severe, and he was fairly beaten afterwards. He got well above the birds, and they did not wait for him to scare them, rising when he was fully a couple of hundred yards from them. They came sailing along quietly enough, but settled again before reaching me. Poor Tom, however, made up his mind to continue his tactics, and this time he was successful. Five curlews and about a dozen greenshanks, together with

a score of oxbirds, took the alarm, and got up amidst a concert of indignant whistles. I crouch in my hole, and only my eyes are above the level of the grass, so as to see what goes on. Two redshanks come close to me, and settle. The oxbirds, nothing loath, settle also ; the curlews, seeing all apparently peaceful, make up their minds to do the same; but I get the gun in a line with one of them, and pull. He is quite smashed, and with the second shot I wing another. The dog thereupon chases him. The bird two or three times doubles like a hare, then strikes out with his bill, and utters "calls" in a desperate fashion. I have reloaded quickly with two No. 2 shot cartridges, for I know full well that the other birds may come again, and they do ; but they keep too far away, as they swoop close to their comrade, and I could only get one more. Tom, in the distance, then jumps up, dances a hornpipe on the wet sward, and waves his hat frantically.

It is wonderful how a successful shot enlivens matters. Seldom, to our minds, had the sun been more brilliant, the grass more green, and life altogether pleasanter than when we had the three curlews in our hands.

On referring to our watches we found that "the enemy" was getting on apace. It was 12.30 P.M., and very nearly low tide. We sat down on the bank and had a snack and a pull at the sherry-flask, and then resumed our tramp.

The birds had increased wonderfully, but that was nothing as compared with the numbers that turned up when evening drew near, and the tide, rising, drew them up higher, nearer the sea-wall.

We found only one more snipe in the course of the afternoon. The dog flushed it within twenty yards of us, and we both missed it, as we were talking at the time and

not ready. We marked it down, but could not get to it, on account of a large creek barring the way in a disgusting manner.

We saw several herons (but could not mark one anywhere near a bank) and about a hundred and fifty curlews, with innumerable sandpipers. Of the latter we bagged over a dozen (whilst walking back towards the ferry), and amongst these were two redshanks and a greenshank. Oxbirds were in shoals.

This abundance of birds of course was the result of the cold weather. I had been at the same place a week before for an afternoon's sport, and had had very meagre success indeed, the weather being then by far too mild for any business, unless at high tide and by keeping behind the sea-walls, when one may pop on birds unawares. But as it turned out, by some mistake in a tide-table, I had got to Benfleet just when the tide had turned and it was so hot that the birds were feeding everywhere away from the marsh mostly.

We had a rare bag on our return to Benfleet, at dark, and as we found that we had to wait some two hours or so before a train could take us back to town, we resolved to go on to Pitsea, and did so, getting there in very ample time for the train. At Pitsea we met a shooter who had been about the marsh there with a dog, and he had a very good bag too. He had seen, he said, a lot of coots on one of the ponds, and, as an acquaintance of mine has the right of shooting over some of the Pitsea Marsh, I intend, one of these days, to go with him, and give the coots a dusting with my 4-bore. I had received several queries concerning the shooting at Canvey Island, and the present chapter will supply much of the information wanted.

My opinion is that the eastern shore, for fair tramping

sport, is far better than the western one. As regards the many inquiries I received about the Thames creeks, &c., may I refer my correspondents to my first two books, Shooting and Fishing Trips; they will find therein many narratives of excursions to the best spots, not only on the Thames, but all round the south and east coasts; and these narratives will supply the information applied for. Should, however, further explanations be needed, I am always ready to supply them as far as my own knowledge serves me, and all letters sent to me are duly replied to.

CHAPTER X.

SEASONABLE SPORT AFTER "THE SEASON."

IT was in March. I was moodily looking at my paraphernalia of guns and rods, thinking with unmitigated disgust that the season for sport was practically over, and that perforce I would have to remain idle for some months to come, when the postman brought me a note from one of my Kentish friends, a man as gun-struck as ever any sportsman need be.

"Since the 1st of February," his epistle ran on, "we have not been about the big wood. Will you come down to-night? We will beat the outskirts to-morrow for rabbits and go in for wood-pigeons. It will be good fun!"

"The very thing for this child!" I exclaimed; and I went.

Now the said big wood has the most infernal under-covert I have ever had to deal with. The bramble branches are therein so long, so strong, and so thickly studded with briars and thorns that a man has to lift up his feet about the height of his head, more or less, at each step he takes; and that style of walking both tires the muscles and ruffles the temper. Just when a rabbit is sprung from the side of one of the innumerable drains, you find your sleeves and legs held, as in a vice, by half-a-dozen wiry creeping branches that reach all sorts of altitudes, and in your endeavours to

pepper bunny you destroy your tailor's works of art, and prick your own precious self to untold depths.

Still it is good fun, and I always return to that wood with ever-renewed enthusiasm. The reason for this is that that wood is a "good 'un," as the head-keeper, Thomas, expresses it.

Well, we met Thomas with his two under-keepers and the rabbit beagles at the gate somewhere near 9 o'clock the following morning, and made a move across a large bare field, where a lot of hop-poles, stacked at regular intervals, pointed out the nature of the crops that had been raised there.

Of course, as concerned rabbits, we were tolerably certain of bringing home a cargo of them, the beagles being good ones and the vermin teeming; but as regards birds—wood-pigeons, and such like—it was a different thing. As we were walking on, we saw about a score of these fellows going towards the east side of the wood, and they settled there amongst the trees. I told my friend that if we went quietly near the corner of the covert, and ambushed ourselves there, we might have a chance to score, provided the men went round and scared the birds by going through the farmyard into the wood. He agreed that we might as well try; and Thomas taking the hint, went away with the other fellows.

"When you see the birds gone, Thomas," my friend called out to him, "you may uncouple the beagles, and walk them on towards us."

And they went. There was a bitter cold wind blowing, and whilst the keepers were going round we sheltered ourselves somewhat behind a stack of hop-poles. In about five minutes the men had evidently entered the wood, for the pigeons began to get on the wing by twos and threes. We

then separated and took up our positions. The first lots passed much too far on my right; but at last three came together, skimming over the tops of the trees, and as we kept perfectly quiet the first notice they had of our presence was from a shot out of my friend's gun, which grassed one of the lot. The two others were scared considerably and came my way, when I brought down one and crippled the other with my left barrel.

He turned back, and I saw him settling on a tree.

"Got him?" called out my friend.

"No. But I know where he is."

And as there was no likelihood that the other pigeons, if any were behind, would come our way just then, I went into covert to knock the fellow off his perch. When I reached the tree he was nowhere to be seen. I looked, and looked, and looked, and nearly dislocated my neck in my attempts at discovering his whereabouts, and then, after I had gone two or three times round the tree with my nose in the air, I placed my foot on something soft, which turned out to be the bird, quite dead.

I picked him up, and the beagles giving tongue just then close by, I bolted out of covert and resumed my watch outside. Suddenly my companion shoulders and fires; then he nods at me in a satisfied manner, whence I conclude that one bunny at any rate has gone to the happy feeding-grounds. He reloads, and then I see him snap his gun hurriedly. He again shoulders, and whilst I mentally exclaim, "Drat his impudence! Is he going to have all the fun?" bang! goes his gun, and I see a white tip of tail going heels over head through the intervening hedge.

Then, "Yap! yap! yap!" I turn round, and just catch a glimpse of the old bitch vigorously pushing under the brambles. I clutch the gun; whist! a rabbit darts out

and scampers along the fence, and I nail him in a satisfactory manner. Then Rattler comes out with his mother and seizes the defunct by the head. She takes hold of the loins, and then "Pull devil, pull baker!" If I don't run they will skin him after their fashion, for both are thoroughly in earnest, and they growl at each other desperately. I go up and turn them off. Thomas calls out, "Rout them out, good little 'uns! Rout them out!" They both cock up their long ears in their way, and after a moment's hesitation they are off to the well-known voice.

"Cack! cack-cack-cack-cack!" A cock pheasant! He rises majestically, sweeps round a tree, and turns towards me in full swing. I aim at him for the fun of the thing, and think, "If it were not that the season is closed, methinks I could send you an ounce or so of 6-shot out of a Schultze cartridge, and that would put an end to all your cack-cack-cacks for ever, my fine fellow!" And he goes over me, and sails away brilliantly.

My friend, who has seen my pantomime, grins.

"I really thought at first you were going to nail him," he says; "you did seem longing to have a crack at him somehow."

I daresay I did.

Whilst he was speaking, "Mark cock!" calls out Thomas in a stentorian voice.

"Mark cock!" re-echoes his son's voice; and you may readily believe, kind reader, that we opened our eyes precious wide, but we did not catch a glimpse of his cockship.

Thomas then calls out:

"Will you please come this way, gentlemen; he has settled near the ride—I saw him."

We hurry on, and walk quickly down the ride, leaving

the beagles to take care of themselves. The men then form themselves in a line with us—Thomas between us, his son on my right, and the other keeper on the left of my friend.

In this wise we beat the thick under-covert, the men *tick-tocking* with their sticks to the best of their power; but we quarter thus about a hundred yards of the wood without finding any signs of the bird.

We then turn back and hold a consultation. Thomas, sen., asserts that he has positively seen the bird land about the place where we have been, and we agree to re-beat it. Meanwhile two of the beagles turn up, and we enlist them forthwith in the search.

"Rout 'em out!" begins again, together with the usual tick! tock! whack! of the sticks on the bushes.

Up goes a rabbit. I fire, knock him on his nose, and simultaneously rises the

"Mark cock!" of our excited beaters.

Now, thanks to the smokeless Schultze powder, I was enabled to place my second barrel at once, and just as the woodcock was reaching the top branches of a large tree, I was lucky enough to kill him, and he came down head first like a brick. Now I am convinced that if my gun had been loaded with ordinary black powder it would have been an impossibility to kill that bird. There would have been a cloud of thick heavy smoke about my eyes just in the nick of time, and a second's delay would have lost me that shot.

Well, the bird picked up, we made tracks for the north side of the covert, where the underwood is about the thickest in the whole covert; and as there was a pool there close to the thicket, we conjectured that another woodcock, or perhaps a brace of them, might possibly be there, besides

the usual run of bunnies, on the high and dry part of the ground. As we did not wish to disturb the pheasants we did not walk through the wood to our destination, but passed outside, whilst the men kept within, along the border, and hustled the rabbits with the dogs. We thus bagged about a dozen more, and when we reached the corner we took up good positions for firing. My companion planted himself in the ride, and I stood at the gate, from whence I commanded two sides of the wood. The hedge was somewhat thick, and was, moreover, supplemented by a dry, narrow ditch, running along the covert. This dry ditch, however, being on the right side, almost filled with brambles, was a nuisance and a bother, as it gave shelter to the rabbits on the run. I could just catch a glimpse of them, and that was all, as they would dive into that hollow sort of tunnel, and were there out of sight. On the left, however, for some reason or other, the ground and ditch had been pretty well cleared of under-covert, and I therefore made up my mind to get the rabbits driven that way if possible.

"Bear up to your left, beaters!" I shouted, "and try to bring the beagles to the fence. There are five or six rabbits in the ditch."

Thomas, jun., thereupon made a wide circuit, and came out to stop the runaways from going too far.

Meanwhile we had about ten shots, and bagged eight rabbits. Then the beagles picked up the scent at the fence, and one after the other they went into the ditch. My friend and I ran at once to the rescue. I stood near young Thomas, my friend stopped at the place I had originally occupied, and the stampede began.

Five rabbits took to the open, and were all bagged. Two or three rushed back to covert and to earth. Moreover, we

discovered, through the vehement scratching and whining of an enthusiastic puppy, that another earth had recently been excavated at the drains, and Thomas, putting his hand into one of the burrows, actually pulled out a bunny, alive and well. This concluded our morning's sport, and for the first time I accompanied my friend to luncheon at the keeper's house close by. Now some articles of mine, it appears, had given very great satisfaction to the whole family of the Thomases, so much so that the deference shown to me by everybody at the keeper's was positively alarming to my modesty. I suppose they thought that a man who writes for *Nunquam Dormio* always "keeps an eye" on those whom he dislikes, for they fairly outvied with one another to make "Wildfowler's" stay under their roof as comfortable as circumstances would admit.

Luncheon over, we went forth once more. Thomas, jun., had left with the cart for the station, where my friend expected a new beagle by the mid-day train, so his father had recruited one of the farm hands to accompany us as beater. This new fellow, evidently green in all matters pertaining to shooting, but not at some other things, soon edified us as to his views on the point at issue. He collared a long stout cudgel, and entered into his duties with the look of a shrewd loafer who has the run of a bit of copse on the sly. At any rate he could see rabbits anywhere, and almost scent them.

He began rather queerly:

"There be one, mister!" said he to my friend, and he thereupon fetched the rabbit such a crack on the head as to send him to the other side of the Styx.

Quoth my friend with anger and astonishment: "What the deuce do you mean, my man? We don't want you to kill the rabbits!"

"Noa?" inquired the rustic, with innocence.

"Of course not, you fool!" roared Thomas. "Just you spring them, that is all."

"Oh, be that it?" rejoined the clodhopper. "I thought that as the gentlemen were killing rabbits they wanted me to lend them a hand."

And there was a twinkle in his eyes.

"You are not such a fool as you would like us to believe," I thought; but I said nothing.

But of all beaters commend me to that fellow. I was almost horrified at the sort of uncanny instinct with which he found the rabbits.

"There be anuther, sir," he would say, pointing with his stick into a thick lot of brambles, where, for the life of me, I could not think where the bunny could be. It was almost marvellous to see him; and considering how cleverly he had handled his cudgel just before, I have no doubt that, provided he had free scope given him to range over a well-tenanted wood, he would not experience much difficulty in filling up a sack with rabbits. I believe old Thomas rather made a note of the man's cleverness, and henceforth probably he will be pretty well looked after every evening when the farm work is over. Keepers do not like such clever men in the neighbourhood of their beats.

At about 4 o'clock the wood-pigeons began to reappear; their roosting-time was drawing near at hand, and a few of them passed over our heads on their usual tours of inspection. We had only flushed one from a tree during the day, and he of course had escaped scot free. Now we thought it would not be a bad plan if we sent the beagles home, and devoted the remainder of the day to the birds. They had three favourite roosting-places in the large wood, and we accordingly separated. My

friend went his way, accompanied by our poaching beater, who was to carry his ammunition and his birds. Thomas remained with me for the same purpose, and the under-keeper coupled and took the beagles home.

Thomas led me to a cluster of enormous trees, behind one of which we ensconced ourselves, and there we kept quite still, waiting for events. We were listening intently, and after ten minutes had been thus spent without anything turning up to relieve the monotony of our watch, my thoughts were wandering away to some other subject, when old Thomas signed to me, and pointed over his shoulder without moving. I heard then the rustling of heavy wings, and half-a-dozen shadows flitted swiftly above our heads amidst the tree-tops. Bang and bang! I fire, though I can scarcely discern the birds. We listen, and a heavy thud, accompanied by a crackling of dead branches rattled down by the bird as it fell, tells us that one at least has come to grief.

"That was a lucky shot, sir," says Thomas, with a smile; and I agree with him.

He then makes his way to the spot where the pigeon is fluttering, kills it, and returns to me.

"There will be some more birds presently," he whispers; "of an evening, one may see fifty of them at the very spot we are at now."

In a few minutes two birds make their appearance, but I fancy they did not belong to the place, as they passed high, and their line of flight was as straight as could be, judging from which we conjectured that they were bound probably to the spot where my friend had taken his stand, some half mile farther down, near the hop-field.

"They are going to him," I said to Thomas; and

within two minutes we heard the distant bang-bang of his gun in the valley.

Meanwhile, we heard some noise behind us. I peeped round carefully, and discovered, on a branch, two doves pecking at each other—half-cooing, half-angry. They looked so very nice that I had not the heart to kill them. And they, unaware of our presence, carried on their little game with great spirit.

"Can't you see them, sir?" whispered Thomas.

"Oh yes," I rejoined; "but I would not kill them for worlds. They are too pretty to kill."

"Yes," said Thomas, "they are very handsome little things; and they *cooo* so lovely in the spring-time all over these woods that it makes the place quite romantic. I have seen visitors stopping to listen to them; and I once caught a couple of lovers crying on each other's shoulder because the doves were cooing!"

And the worthy old man shrugged his shoulders in deprecation of such nonsensical proceedings. But then *his* cooing-time is over, and he forgets now that he was young and foolish once.

Well, the doves went their way a moment afterwards; then some wood-pigeons turned up, and I bagged altogether three more. It was getting dark then, and we heard my friend's whistle sounding from the road.

"That is a signal for us to join him, Thomas. Let us go now."

He picked up our birds, and we made tracks across the underwood straight for the lane, where, to our astonishment, we found my friend, finger on trigger, watching the hedge, which his beater was, from the inside, thrashing like steam.

"What is it?" I inquired.

"Hush!" said he, "it is a polecat. Thomas, do you run home and bring the terriers. I saw the polecat crossing the lane, but too late to fire. He is in the hedge, or in a hole in the bank for certain; and anyhow the dogs will soon get him out if they come in time."

Thomas thought that before he could be back the vermin would have made good its escape, and that was likely enough, when, as fate would have it, a cart came up behind us, and in it was his son with the new beagle.

"Put him on," I urged.

He slipped him and brought him to the polecat's road, which he seemed to acknowledge at once and to relish greatly, for he dived immediately below the thick matting of underwood, and, whining desperately, climbed the bank and there began to scratch furiously. The men went to look, and young Thomas, suddenly stooping, seized the vermin by the head, and, with a sudden stretch and twist, "did" for it.

"How did you manage that?" I inquired.

"Why, he put his head out of the hole to stare at us," said the young fellow, "so I collared him."

And, saying these words, he held the vermin at arm's length, brushing its hair carefully down along the back.

"Shot spoils them," he explained. "It is much better to settle them so."

"Yes, but then he might have bitten you?"

"Of course, sir, he would if he could; but I did not give him the chance."

And he laughed, whilst the clever beater stared at him, open mouthed. "I would not have cared to have touched him myself," that worthy at last remarked to the keeper

as we were walking home; "the way he snapped at my stick was enough for me."

And he shook his head knowingly.

Our bag was heavy and, including our last acquisition, was somewhat varied.

Taken all in all, that day was with us very pleasantly employed, and when game is protected by the close season I think a little seasonable sport of that sort is not to be despised. At any rate I liked it, and thought the whole affair exceedingly good fun.

CHAPTER XI.

A BY-DAY AT THE NORE.

THE foremost amongst the duck tribes had come. They had made their first noticeable appearance a few days before, although a few birds had been seen previously about the mouth of the river, but these were very few and very far between; so much so that a friend of mine who does a deal of yacht-gunning, had been out for a two days' sail, and had only managed to get two birds home, and of these two one only was a duck proper. His second bird was a black duck.

Since then, however, Tom had called on me, and said that our friend had come up to town for some 4-bore cartridges, which he could not get at Southend, and that he (Tom) intended going back with him to the yacht. Would I join them? If so, no time was to be lost, and we would all travel together, spend the night on board, and set sail before daybreak for a turn at the ducks, which our intended host had declared to have increased amazingly.

This was too tempting an offer to be resisted, and I packed up an old 4-bore and my double 10-bore, together with a hundred cartridges for the latter and twenty-five for the former.

As some correspondents may be induced to try 4-bore

guns—certainly the most killing and handy tools for wild-duck shooting at sea—I will give the official loading for my own cartridges: viz. 140 grains of Schultze and 3 ounces of No. 2 shot. The effect of these loads is prodigious.

When Tom and I arrived at Fenchurch Street to meet our friend, we found him there with a bulky man, who was smoking a porcelain pipe about the size, more or less, of a yacht-stove.

"Hallo!" quoth Tom, "Cock-chafer is going to join us, it seems."

The Cock-chafer alluded to was indeed going to be a companion of ours for the trip; and I may mention that he is a German sportsman, so nicknamed by some friends because they found his real name a difficult one to pronounce; and as it was Schaeffer they jumped to Cockchafer as a solution readily. We got into a smoking compartment, which was soon thoroughly warmed by the monstrous pipe, and by holding one's hands towards its bowl one could get the heat at a good distance. At least so we told the "Chafer," who laughed at our jokes; and he is really a nice fellow, although his 16-bore pin-fire breechloader may be safely held guiltless of the "fowl" murders we subsequently committed.

We arrived at 9.30 P.M. at Southend, and being loaded with hampers, guns, and ammunition, went in two cabs to the shore.

When we got there it began to drizzle, and our row to the yacht (which was anchored off the jetty in sufficiently deep water to keep her afloat at low tide) was anything but cheerful, as the night was pitch-dark, and the pitter-patter of the heavy drops of rain as they whacked the water was not exactly a soul-inspiriting sound.

We went below to supper, after which we turned in, and a very "tight fit" this "turning in" proved to be. Four fellows in a cabin twelve feet by ten feet are necessarily "cribbed" in all senses of the word.

We got up at a very early hour, when all without was still dark. The tide was coming up, and the yacht's stern had swung round with it, and the wind coming up with the tide made things very lively.

Extensive breakfast preparations were then got under weigh forward, the partition between the cabin and fo'c'sle was slid back, and the man and boy began to set the table whilst we outside performed our ablutions. Tom, moreover, went overboard, and I would have done the same as in olden times; but now I am somewhat subject to cramps, and, as I was nearly drowned twice last year, I wisely abstained from joining my friend, although I envied him his treat.

We then got our breakfast, prepared the dingey for cripple service—*i.e.* placed an ammunition-box ready under the stern, put on the rowlocks, and slipped in the sculls; got the mast and sail in, although they probably would not be needed; and, about twenty minutes before daybreak we purchased our anchor and set sail.

A cheerless morning, dull sky, dull sea, a rumbling wind, a heavy tide, and a few drops of rain still hovering about. I donned a suit of oilskins, sou'wester and all, so as to be ready for anything, and sat with the other fellows, smoking in the cabin until we had enough light to see about shooting. I had placed the 4-bore in the fo'c'sle, as I intended popping out there at the hatchway and firing therefrom. The owner of the yacht had ranged his artillery in the cockpit, and reserved unto himself and the other fellows that very comfortable spot; and thus we sailed on until the

light at the cabin windows made our lamp look rather foolish, when we extinguished it and went on deck to look out.

The rain was still coming down, and it soon drove Tom and Chafer below, as they had no oilskins; but the owner and I stuck comfortably to our posts, with a strong injunction laid upon us by our companions to let them know when anything was stirring.

"The birds will fly low on account of the rain when they come over to settle for the day, so we must keep a sharp watch along the surface of the sea," I remarked to my host; "we may then spy some of the companies in their flight, and mark them down perhaps."

"Bird astern, sir," said the helmsman.

We both turned round, and Tom and the other fellow came out too, quietly, and I wished I had been with them, as, from my post, I could not possibly fire astern.

As it turned out, however, I got that shot after all. It was still rather dark, but I caught sight readily enough of the new comer, although I could not tell what it was. It was moving at a great rate; so I popped the muzzle of the 4-bore forward, and pitched it a good yard or two ahead of the bird, then pulled, and down he dropped, quite dead. Tom jumped into the dingey with the lad, and went to it, whilst we turned her head to the wind. It was a large diver.

Tom then said he would squat on deck near the fo'c'sle hatchway, by my side, so as to have some fun too, and a coil of rope did for a seat for him. I stood up with the Dollond and scanned the horizon. There were several small companies on the wing near the mud-flats of the Isle of Sheppey, and I saw two popping down, but where it was impossible to tell, as when they flew low they could not be

picked out from the waves. I was about to put down the glass when I caught sight of some necks about five hundred yards from us, and when the waves chased each other, I counted four birds "on the squat." They were just in a line between the Nore lightship and our own craft.

"Keep her steady to sail astern the lightship," I instructed the man at the tiller, and we prepared ourselves for action, and went on under easy sail.

When we got within a hundred and fifty yards of them I kept the gun at them, having fully made up my mind to fire the moment they meant going, no matter at what range under that distance. The yacht rolls, shakes her wings, rights herself, and forges ahead, rising over a huge wave, and we are twenty yards nearer. Another lurch, another heave, another push forward, and we are about a hundred yards off, when we felt pretty sure of one or two birds. Then suddenly the yacht sinks into a hollow, and when she rises again a sudden gust of wind bends her under, and she goes like an arrow under the lee of the birds. Now or never! We are within seventy yards of them, and are leaving them, when one of them gets up, the others flap their wings, and the two 4-bores are fired. Two birds are killed, one is crippled, and the last gets away unharmed, although Tom and Chafer fire at it with their field-guns.

"The same old game," sings out Tom, as he jumps into the dingey to pick up the birds; and he finds the cripple a "tartar," and we enjoy seeing him in chase. The bird dives like a professional before the shot reaches him. Tom, however, orders the lad to row round, and thus drives his wily customer towards the yacht, when we offer Chafer the opportunity of settling it. He, much pleased, adjusted his spectacles carefully, then looked *under* them, and finally

aimed deliberately at the bird. The latter did not expect anything of the sort from our quarter, and forgetting to dive in time he got it so hot that he turned on his back, and went forthwith to the happy feeding-grounds. He was an enormous mallard, and a beautiful bird to boot.

When Tom came back we baptised our first "bag" in a glass of sherry, and were very merry over it.

It was getting broad daylight then, and the weather cleared up somewhat, but it became again overcast during the afternoon.

We had our next "company" about two miles west of the lightship. There were seven birds this time, all widgeon, and we agreed on our plan of attack. I was to fire first as a signal, and also in order that our loads of shot might reach different birds instead of hitting the identical ones, as had been probably the case in our first shot.

These widgeons were a little more wary than the ducks, and they faced the wind, and looked "scared" a long time before we were within range. That made us feel rather doubtful as to our ultimate success, and in this we were right; for before we could get up to them they obeyed their leader when he rose, and all flew away.

We kept on the same tack until opposite Warden, when a file of curlews passing within a hundred yards, we gave them both big guns, and got two.

On our next tack we fell in with about fifteen widgeon and teal. Again the widgeon baffled us, and they nearly induced all the teal to go also. Fortunately two of the latter dropped again within sight, and we went in chase of them, and I killed both with my double Tolley 10-bore.

On our way back a duck passed at a tremendous height over us; we both fired, and missed.

Reloaded, and saw six more ducks a little lower, but

also going the same way and at the same rate. We fired together, and one came down a cripple. I do not think I had hit it, as the boat lurched when I was going to pull the trigger; the boom got in my way, and I had to wait a second before firing, and this waiting I think put me out. We sailed up to the cripple, and picked him up with the landing-net.

At 11 o'clock we ran in-shore in order to enjoy our lunch in peace; and the sea and wind having dropped, we found our new quarters as peaceful and steady as *terra firma* itself. The consequence thereof was a tremendous appetite on the part of all hands, and we made a regular clearance of a lot of good things we had brought with us from town.

After lunch we prepared to sail back, but kept tacking, of course, so as to clip any bird on our way. Tom nailed another large diver, and our host with his 4-bore killed a small grebe, at a range of about a hundred yards, as it settled on the sea. Then we saw a single duck, and thinking it was badly crippled, we took to our small-bore guns, and the consequence was he escaped our eight barrels, the range being too great. He went away a long distance, but I kept him in sight; and seeing him settle again we went after him about a mile, and our host bagged him with his big gun and one of my cartridges at fully a hundred yards.

The afternoon was then getting advanced, and we turned her head Southend-bound. We had three more shots at flying birds—all widgeons; got one at last; and when we reached the shore once more we had, for the day's bag, five ducks, one widgeon, two curlews, two divers, two teal, one grebe. Thus ended our by-day at the Nore.

That the flocks had not come yet everyone was bound to expect, as the weather was still too open; but that there

was some sport not to be sneezed at to be had by sailing over the Estuary was pretty evident; and I am convinced that a three days' trip would have got us a score of ducks at the very least, besides other birds.

By-the-way, since writing this, I have had a new single 4-bore, built on the full-choke principle by Messrs. Tolley of Birmingham, and this gun proved eventually a caution to birds.

I have also some news for wildfowl shooters who patronise the "flats." I have invented a pair of waders and boots combined, which will be completely waterproof, extremely light, thoroughly ventilated, and rigged in such a manner that the wading-breeches or leggings might be removed easily in a moment, whenever needed, leaving a pair of ordinary boots on the shooter's feet. But I will see a firm of waterproofers on the subject, and will then inform my readers where to obtain these devoutly-wished-for implements.

CHAPTER XII.

A WILDFOWL-SHOOTING EXPEDITION NEAR SOUTHEND.

IT was towards the end of the frosty weather we experienced in December, 1875, that I went with a friend of mine in his 5-ton yacht on that expedition.

I had just come back to town from a trip on the Blackwater and on the Colne in the 12-tonner *Fairy*, when, as I was having a clearance of my game-bag, &c., my friend Tom and his brother turned up. The collars of their ulsters were right up to their ears, and as they stood stamping their feet on the mat in the hall, Tom declared that "this was just the sort of weather to hatch white bears in."

"Been out?" asked he; and when he saw my ducks, &c., on the table: "Oh, oh! that is a good bag this time. Where did you get them?"

I explained the whole affair, and asked him where his boat was.

"At Gravesend," he said.

"Then why don't you sail down the river?" I went on; "lots of duck at the Nore. Don't you two like duck-shooting?"

"Dead nuts on it, we are," he said; "but don't know how to proceed. If you will come with us we will go."

We went there and then to Gravesend, where we at once provisioned the yacht with fuel, drinkables, and eatables, and at seven the next morning we set sail for the field of action.

The weather was, as Tom feelingly expressed it, "beastly cold," and the landscape was clothed in its white garb, which made the Thames-water (at no time very clear) look for the time being remarkably yellow and muddy.

Of course, as it was freezing hard, birds of all kinds were hungry, and I have rarely heard such a lot of firing as we heard then on our way. It seemed as if everybody who could buy, borrow, or steal a gun had come out with it, and with the firm intention of using it, for from every quarter as we sailed down the estuary there came multitudes of detonations, varying in tone and intensity from the mere crack of the popgun of the youthful amateur up to the heavy boom of the swivel-gun of the professional.

"If every shot tells," said Tom's brother, "we will just be too late for the fun; these fellows will have shot everything."

Along the Tilbury sea-wall were eight or nine shooters. Opposite from the "Ship and Lobster" public-house up to the Shorn Marshes we counted over thirty. Besides these there were at least twenty boats out with gunners; and over land and over sea the firing was something to be heard to be believed in.

When we reached the Lower Hope Point, however, we lost sight of the shore-shooters; for as the tide was getting low we had accordingly to keep in mid-channel, in order to avoid the mud-banks which from thence line both shores.

The first sight we had of ducks was off the Hole Haven, where a "file" were on the wing, and we at once got our guns out.

We had two double central-fire 10-bores, one double ditto 12-bore, and a single 4-bore on the Snider principle. This last gun was a stunner; its barrel was fully five feet long, and I am certain the whole of the instrument must have weighed pretty nearly 15 lb. It was Tom's property—a new purchase; he had never fired it yet, and, to be candid, I rather think he funked the job. I looked over the gun, and as it appeared to me as good a piece as money could buy, I had no hesitation in accepting the office of gunner, much to Tom's gratification.

"You go forward with it," said he; "the lad will clear up the fo'c'sle for your feet, and you can stand in the hatchway and be very comfortable."

Well, I went with my pipe, and we kept our eyes skinned wide.

Along Canvey Island, near the Chapman Light, we fell in with our first batch—about twenty-five ducks and widgeons, all mixed. We tried to get near enough to the lot for a shot; but they were wild, and got up when we tacked. So we resumed our journey, and as the estuary was there some three miles wide, we thought it best to cut across it in two or three tacks, so as to beat it well, rather than sail straight down and perhaps leave birds behind us.

Our first tack from Canvey Point to the Kent shore took place in sight of the Southend Pier, which loomed on our port side some two miles away. When about half way across, where the sea was somewhat rough, we sighted another company. I took up the long gun, Tom's brother came by my side with the two double 10-bores, and Tom himself collared the 12-bore and hid in the cockpit, the lad being at the tiller, with strict injunctions to keep his eyes on my hands, as we could not call out orders. Well, I signalled him port twice, and perceiving

no answering motion of the boat, I turned round to see what our steersman was up to, and found that he had seen the birds and thought he would take upon himself to take us to them; but as he was sailing her right into the lot, that would never do, and I accordingly told him not to mind the birds but to mind me. When we got to about a hundred and fifty yards two or three of the ducks rose, and by the time we had covered thirty more yards the whole lot got up. I fired in desperation. Tom fired, and his brother fired, but all the birds went their way, as if nothing had happened. Of course it was the lad's fault.

Tom then took the tiller, and sent the lad to see below "if we were there," and we took a tack back towards Southend. There was a puntsman then crawling along the mud-banks, evidently going home, and we sailed towards him to inquire about birds.

"There be none on this 'ere side," he shouted; "but past the Nore Light vessel, near the Isle of Sheppey, there be several companies on 'em! I see'd 'em!"

This with an emphatic motion of the head. We thanked him heartily, and shaped our course E. by S.; passed the Nore vessel; met there with a cross sea and a heavy tide, so that plunging became the order of the day. Indeed but it was so rough that it became doubtful whether a gun could be held tolerably straight under the circumstances. However, in the midst of the turmoil we discovered another bunch, consisting of about a dozen members.

"Now let us see if we cannot manage this lot," said Tom, as he thrust his sou'wester down on his head; and easing her a bit she flew under the lee of the birds. When we passed them at a range of about eighty yards they all rose in a lump. I fired the big gun, and six birds fell, the others steaming away like fun. Of the six birds down

three were quite dead, but the others were wonderfully lively, though well crippled. I jumped into the dingey with Tom's brother, and the lad pulled away with a will, whilst the yacht's head was turned to the wind to await our return.

The first bird fell an easy prey to our first barrels, but the second and third led us a deuce of a dance. We could not fire with certainty—the sea was so rough that a wave was sure to crop up just when one of us was pulling trigger; and the bird would then dive on the report, and then it was another wild-goose chase for it amidst the billows. On the other hand, if the sea was a bother to us, it was none the less a nuisance to the birds—it tired them; and eventually we were enabled to bag the lot. We found that it consisted of five ducks and one widgeon. These were the birds I mentioned in a note to *The Country* as the result of one shot with a 4-bore gun off Southend.

Well, when we had done with our birds we turned round to look for the yacht, and lo! it had gone, and was scudding away, miles away, towards Southend. Here was a go! We conjectured, and rightly too, that Tom had been unable, being single-handed, to keep her steady to the wind during our absence, and had therefore gone on a tack, intending to pick us up on his next. This, however, appeared to us somewhat problematical, as a heavy fall of snow made up its mind just then to come down in blinding sheets, and we began to feel somewhat scared at the prospect of an unlimited row, without bearings, in our small boat over the unruly Sea Reach. Howbeit we put on our best countenances and pulled with all our might towards where we thought the pier ought to be. We shipped meanwhile two or three stern-waves, being heavily laden, and were glad at last to see the yacht looming in the snow

and coming back towards us. Tom hove to, and we rowed aboard, where we found the roaring fire in the cabin a most acceptable comfort, after our exposure in the open dingey.

We then kept on sailing here and there and everywhere over the Reach until about 3 P.M., when, finding no more birds and being unable to stay any longer owing to some engagements in town, we turned her head home, and arrived at her moorings about 11 P.M., all very tired, but very happy.

Thus ended our trip to Southend. Our bag was nothing very wonderful, it is true, but the sport nevertheless had been to us extremely interesting and fascinating.

In ordinary weather there are only a few birds to be found in the estuary, but when the snow covers the ground and the frost is lasting, there are always some companies to be met with at the mouth of the Thames. The neighbourhood of Southend is then tolerably fair for shooting; it is especially so when there is no official artillery practice taking place at Shoeburyness.

HINTS AND REMARKS ON SHOOTING.

HINTS AND REMARKS ON SHOOTING.

CHAPTER XIII.

FACTS ABOUT PIGEON-SHOOTING.

PIGEONS are hard to hit and harder to kill, and it is no small criterion of a man's coolness and skill, and of the killing powers of his gun, to bring the birds down with anything like tolerable certainty; hence the dubious honour conferred on pigeons by their being chosen for shooting-matches. A healthy and strong blue rock's jump out of the trap, and his subsequent dashing flight, are "cautions" certainly; but all these difficulties notwithstanding, I have some uneasy notions about me that the sport is not altogether free from cruelty. However, since it is carried on, and putting sentiment aside, there is a good deal to be said about the skill required in order to successfully compete with the bird's peculiar ways of flight. The knack is indeed a peculiar one, and, as a rule, closely resembles snap-shooting. Almost all our pigeon cracks, if

not all, fire at their birds the very instant they jump out of the trap for their flight. The reason for this snap-shooting is obvious. As the birds, to be counted as killed, must fall within certain limits, it is of the utmost importance that they should be hit as soon as possible, so as to allow of the second barrel being fired at them, if necessary, before they have time to get too far, and contrive to escape out of bounds. There are some clubs, however, mostly Continental ones, which surround each trap with a wickerwork enclosure, encircling several square yards of space, beyond which the bird must be before it is fired at. If the bird should be killed in the usual snap-shooting way, and should fall within that enclosure, the pigeon is counted as "a miss," so that the shooters in such cases have to take good care before they fire to let their birds get on the wing without hindrance, and wait until they are quite clear of the little enclosure. This arrangement might prove a great check to the slaughter were the distances from the shooters to the birds the same as in England, but they are not. I have seen some public matches on the Continent where the shooters stood at fifteen yards! This, virtually, places the birds at the mercy of any moderate shooter, the little enclosure notwithstanding. On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that in such matches only one barrel is to be fired, so that nervous shooters are, as a rule, "put out" at the very first round, whilst professionals never miss. Whilst on this point let me inform all "innocent" amateurs that when they try to compete with professional pigeon-shots they are wasting their time and their money, for no amateur has a chance of winning, except on sufferance, a match or a pool where "professors of the art" are admitted as competitors. These men have lots of practice to begin with, and that is more than has the strictly *bonâ*

fide amateur (*i.e.* one whose time is occupied in some profession or business). This is, in itself, a good deal in favour of those "pigeon artists;" but that is not all. The strongest point in their favour is that they invariably, one and all, resort to roguery and unfairness in some way or other. Some have preconceived signals with the puller, whereby they make known to him which trap he is to pull to them when their turn comes. Others cheat in the loading. Those who employ muzzle-loaders always insert therein double or treble charges, and this materially increases their chances of success. True, there is among the rules set for pigeon-shooting a clause which provides for such a contingency, in the following manner—*i.e.* anyone suspecting a shooter of overloading may ask the alleged offender to withdraw his loads, and submit them to the referee's examination. This provision might be supposed to prevent altogether any fraud in that line; but, practically, such a rule might have been left out of the programme altogether, for I am not aware that it has ever been applied to any professional; and yet there are such offending professionals at all, or very nearly all, the pigeon-matches, high or low, that take place nowadays in the British kingdom. You see, it is not pleasant for anyone to have to step up to a man and politely hint to him that he is a rogue and a swindler, by asking to inspect the contents of his gun. The referees ought to perform this unpleasant task; but referees do not much relish that part of their duties.

The fact of the matter is this—no one likes to interfere in such a delicate "irregularity."

At a match at which I quite accidentally assisted, there were two such individuals, who enlivened the proceedings by outrageously loading their muzzle-loaders. Not only

this, but their guns were larger than those officially allowed for the match; one was certainly a 9-bore, the other was a 10-bore. Into these abysses the two fellows piled three fair loads of powder and two of shot—in each barrel, of course. The consequence was, first, an explosion like that of a "Woolwich infant;" and, secondly, all their birds were literally cut into shreds.

Well, I noticed these little irregularities the very first time these benighted knights-of-the-trigger came "to the scratch." I, consequently, entered into conversation with one of them.

"That gun of yours," I said to him, "must be a good gun, for it kills well."

"Yes, it is not a bad gun," said he.

"You load it well, too," I stated.

"As usual," he replied.

And as he was loading then, I had an opportunity of seeing that his "usual" doses consisted of at least seven or eight drachms of best Curtis and Harvey's, and three ounces odd of No. 6 shot. Now I call that a "caution" to pigeons, and no mistake.

Of course that gentleman (?) won the sweepstakes. This, however, had the effect of making two or three amateurs grumble about the little irregularities, which were evidently by that time too glaring to be unnoticed, and one of the discontented ones said to me that he thought they were to be limited to 1¼ oz. of shot and to 12-bore guns.

"So I understand. What of it?" I replied, highly amused.

"Why! this man here shoots with a cannon loaded with a hatful of shot!"

"Well, why don't you complain to the referee?"

My interlocutor scratched his ear, and turning uneasily

about, said at last: "Well, it is very awkward, you know, very! *I* should not like to do it!".

And *there* remains the whole thing. The roguery is patent to all, but no one likes to run the gauntlet of the professionals by exposing their fraud, and as no one finds fault openly with them the evil goes on increasing and the professionals prosper. Only the Manchester rules, as now applied, have put a decided stop to such nefarious practices, simply by getting the cartridges used by the shooters made all alike by the gunsmiths to the clubs, so that all the shooters must, perforce, use breech-loaders of the same calibre, and fire with cartridges loaded as nearly alike as possible. That is a step in the right direction, according to my opinion. I need not say, though, that it meets with considerable censure at the hands of those men whose unfair practices would be virtually put to an end, were these rules to gain favour generally, and be enforced everywhere. Thieves don't like police arrangements, and rogues don't like awkward rules that interfere with their plans, *cela va de soi.*

As regards the preconcerted arrangement of some shooters with the puller, this could easily be prevented by appointing a gentleman to stand by the man; the gentleman to make known to the puller by a signal, or by a number, which trap he is to pull. Such suggestions, I know perfectly well, will be pooh-poohed by the thoughtless and those who are conscious of not being quite guiltless; but we all know that such things are done, and I think it is high time someone should be found bold enough to denounce them and expose their perpetrators. Such gentry are the very first, at a meeting, when the question of the pulling comes on the *tapis*, to exclaim, "Oh, leave it to the man. He will do it well enough!"

And *so he does*, to *their* satisfaction, in a good many cases.

Now, it is no small advantage to know beforehand from which trap one's bird will rise. Anyone may soon convince himself of that truth if he will, for practice, shoot from *one* trap only. He will soon get into the knack of killing his birds. But then let him have five traps, and not know which is to be pulled, and his average, I undertake to say, will be greatly inferior to the preceding one.

That is easily understood. In fact, this ignorance of the particular trap just going to be pulled constitutes *the* difficulty of match-shooting. Therefore, if anyone removes that difficulty, that is making pigeon-shooting easy with a vengeance. There is but one way to prevent such a thing, and that is, as I have hinted above, merely by putting *the choice* of the traps out of the puller's control altogether.

There is, again, another of the Manchester rules which deserves mention. It is to the effect that the gun is to be held below the elbow until the bird is fairly on the wing. This puts a stop to the ludicrous exhibitions one may see at times at some matches where the rule is not enforced, viz. men who shoulder their weapons before saying "Pull," or, when a trap has been pulled and the bird won't rise, the shooter is aiming at the bird all the time, in great trepidation at its unwillingness to get up and be shot. Indeed this trepidation reaches such a pitch sometimes that the shooter refuses the bird, point-blank.

Moreover, I think the rule a very fair one, because, since pigeon-shooting is extolled by some people as being fair practice for actual shooting in the field, and since in the field a sportsman never shoulders his weapon until his game is fairly started, it follows that a shooter should not do so

when at practice. It is not sportsmanlike, and is neither fair to the bird nor to the shooter's adversaries.

The only thing one may wonder at is that such clever rules have been left to the Manchester pigeon-shooters to devise. The London fraternity, who rather pride themselves on being A 1 in all points, are this time left in the lurch, and a provincial town has fairly beaten the head-quarters.

And now a word about the pigeons themselves. Some—I think too sentimental—writers have said something about the mental agony of the birds previous to their being shot. Expectation of danger is agony we all know—that is as far as *we* are concerned; but there is nothing to show that the birds are aware that they are in any danger whatsoever. In fact, judging from what everyone may witness at any pigeon-match, the birds seem placidly indifferent, some even cooing to their heart's content, until their turn comes to be slipped into their traps. Therefore the idea that the birds know what awaits them may be dismissed from our thoughts. The rest is bad enough.

The bird is confined in his little receptacle. Meanwhile a shooter has been taking his stand; he has carefully aimed point-blank at each trap in turn, then he pulls himself together and says, "Are you ready?"

"Yes, my lord," answers the puller.

"Pull!"

The man pulls, open flys the trap, up jumps the bird. Bang! He is hit, and hangs in mid-air; then musters his courage, advances a yard or so, when bang! goes the second barrel, and down comes the pigeon, dead. His lordship has scored one.

In all this the bird has hardly had time to suffer, so to speak. Before he can realise what is happening to him

he is "a dead bird." Therefore, if anything, he suffers less than he would suffer if his throat had been cut at the farm-house previous to his being sent along with a lot of his *confrères* to market.

So far so good. But all the pigeons shot at are not thus killed clean. Most birds are badly wounded. These, however, are quickly picked up and despatched. But some, though hit, manage to escape out of bonds, and die a lingering death; and among these "escapers" a few fly back to their homes. Of the latter but few die. The greater number recover, only, however, to be sent again in the next hamper, and try their luck once more.

Now in so far as the wounded birds are concerned, I call the whole transaction simply preventible cruelty, inasmuch as it arises from blundering arrangements. Nothing would be easier than to prevent any of the pigeons, flown under the guns' fire, from enduring any unnecessary sufferings.

It may seem paradoxical, but in order to prevent any among them from experiencing such pain, I would have the whole lot killed, and I would not let those who escaped out of bonds escape altogether. I would manage it in the following manner:—Immediately beyond and against the boundaries of the ground, I would have a high wall built of bricks, at least eight feet high, behind which I would station a cordon of scouts, on the look-out for escaping birds, and ready to settle them. The wall being so high would afford the men ample security against the gentlemen-shooters' shot, and also protect the latter from being, in return, peppered by the scouts, inasmuch as the latter could not possibly shoot horizontally towards the former; the height of the wall precluding any such attempt.

At the same time *very, very* few birds would escape the

scouts (oftener none than any), for it is vastly more easy to bag a bird that you see coming than one that will rise, goodness and the puller only know from which trap. By this arrangement all the birds, with very few occasional exceptions, would be accounted for, and there would be no chance of seeing occasionally in the papers accounts of pigeons coming back *minus* a leg, or with a "peppered" wing, to their lofts. Such things are barbarous, and, as I have shown, they could easily be remedied. The expense of building the wall would, I think, be soon repaid by the picking up of *escapers*, especially where many matches take place during the season. Howbeit, I throw the hint; whether it be an acceptable one or not, time will prove. Above all things, scouting, as carried on at some low meetings, ought to be discountenanced and repressed by every means in their power by all the committees under whose *ægis* the matches take place, for these amateur scouts are perfectly reckless in their endeavours to bag their birds, and they will blaze away in the midst of the meeting, if occasion offers itself, with a nonchalance and an indifference that are positively astounding.

In conclusion, I must state that all the tricks and rogueries practised at pigeon-matches arise simply from the professional betting in connection therewith. To begin with, if the sport is really a sport, it ought not to require the enticement of betting to make it palatable; and if gentlemen shot only for the sport of the thing, no professional would think of gaining admission among them, and then resort to trickery in order to win the day; but, of course, where sums of money are at stake, these men will come in; and, as they are gentlemen of very easy consciences and very loose principles, we cannot expect from them any but shady proceedings.

Again, if betting were entirely suppressed by the gentlemen themselves—at least, as far as betting with the betting fraternity is concerned—the shooters would soon find themselves rid of a lot of parasites who live and fatten on their substance, and they would be all the better for it.

I cannot conceive what pleasure there can be for a gentleman in entering into any transaction, of whatever sort, with a man whom he knows to be what is emphatically denominated a blackguard and a blackleg. True, the man may pay when he loses—I will admit that many do; but I would not, for one, touch the man's dirty money if he were to offer it to me; therefore far less would I offer to bet with him, or accept his offer to bet with me.

No, it is not nice to see gentlemen mixing with vagabonds, from whatever motive; and if our gentlemen pigeon-shooters of the period would just weed their meetings from all such disreputable individuals, they would find that their sport would not look quite so black as it looks just now in the eyes of outsiders, and that many other gentlemen would be glad to join their ranks for the fun of the thing who now hold back on account of the society to be met with thereat.

As to trying to put down betting by law, it is, I humbly think, a mistake. No one likes to be dictated to, and out of a spirit of reaction against interference, people will bet more than ever. No, this must be brought about by the shooters themselves, as regards pigeon-matches.

Mind, I do not deprecate betting (mild betting, *cela s'entend*) between gentlemen, just for amusement, if they must have it, but I should certainly, first, discountenance all *doubtful* amateurs; and, secondly, I should keep the betting fraternity where it ought to be—*i.e.* outside. I

would not allow a single one of its members to gain admittance to the ground; and if any of them managed to do so, I would have them turned out as soon as ever they would show their true colours. Where there would be neither suspicious shooters nor professional betting-men, all *friponneries*, cheatings, and rogueries would quickly disappear, because they would no longer have a *raison d'être*.

CHAPTER XIV.

SHOOTING AT RANDOM.

THERE is nothing more reprehensible, and nothing more thoroughly heartless and cruel, than the habit of shooting at random indulged in by some thoughtless or too eager shooters.

Everyone knows Landseer's picture of "The Random Shot." It ought to be in every sportsman's household, as a memento of what an amount of untold suffering a moment of thoughtlessness, or of over-eagerness, on his part, may entail upon the animals or birds he pursues.

We all know how such things come to pass. A man has been baffled repeatedly in his attempts to get a fair shot at his game. Foiled, he grows sour, and sourly he resolves to fire anyhow, with the hope of a stray shot hitting somehow. By-and-by a covey rises, really too far off for any sensible man even to think of shouldering his weapon; but our sportsman is desperate, and he blazes away with both barrels in "the brown," *i.e.* the thick of the covey. Perchance a bird falls, and our man exults exceedingly thereat; but he may also have wounded one or more birds among those that flew away; and these, although they have so far managed to escape, are doomed to die a most horrible death—a death of starvation and suffering com-

bined. All this for the sake of one bird, and oftener none. It is, therefore, not only great foolishness, but a downright shame and gratuitous cruelty to act thus.

Young sportsmen are very apt to commit that kind of "sporting crime."

The spirit of emulation, however worthy of commendation in itself, in their case overreaches the mark, and makes them forget the very first rule of honour in the field of sport, *i.e.* never to fire in the brown. But they are so zealous in their new avocation, and withal so anxious to emulate the deeds of those who are more experienced than they, that they are apt to overlook the conditions of that trial of skill, and they hope to, at least, equal in numbers the game killed by their companions. But young shooters must not forget that game is not to be got anyhow; it is to be shot fairly and in a sportsmanlike manner; and random shooting being cruel is, *de facto*, unsportsmanlike; therefore, honestly, birds bagged in that wise ought not merely to count as no birds, but also entail disqualification from further competition until due apology and amends have been made by the party so offending.

If, young man, when you went to any competitive examination you were caught "prigging" (which I very much doubt, as you would not be guilty of such a base proceeding), you would be not only turned out of the room, but also disqualified. Well, when you secure a bird by wounding a lot more, or by running the risk of wounding a lot more, you are guilty there also of taking an unfair advantage over your companions; in fact, you would be doing worse than mere "prigging," you would be laying yourself open to be considered a cheat—and this a lad of honour would avoid, as well in sport as in other affairs—without mentioning the cruelty of the proceeding to the poor birds.

It is bad enough for them to have to be killed, without being indiscriminately wounded, and nobody being either the wiser or better off for it. Therefore, young sportsmen, avoid shooting at more than one bird at a time, and do not think you will be the losers by it; quite the reverse.

I met once, at a shooting-party, a young fellow whose conduct every sporting lad of spirit ought to imitate. He happened to walk right in the midst of a large covey of partridges as we were beating a turnip-field, and, as it will sometimes happen, the birds would not separate, and they flew away together in a lump until they were about sixty yards off, when they swept over the hedge and disappeared. Our young fellow stood stock still, "on the ready," keenly watching for a chance, but he let them go quietly.

"Well, John," some one of our party called out, "why did you not fire?"

"Why, uncle, I could not pick out *one* single bird!"

Such a reply won for the lad the esteem of every sportsman present.

It is not everybody that could readily make, *à l'impromptu*, such a sensible reply; but everyone can act as this lad did, and that is enough for the purpose.

There are, however, some men who cannot (or rather, I should say, will not) resist the temptation. Lamentable consequences of such conduct I could give by the score, for I have had an extensive and varied experience both of sportsmen and of sporting incidents, accidents, and adventures.

The most startling among these, however, in connection with random shooting, happened in Alsace some years ago whilst I was there on a visit to a friend. We were coming home one evening after a hard day's shooting, and the dogs had been left at a keeper's, when on crossing a short fern common, a roebuck feeding under covert, startled by our

voices, bolted straight down the path in front of us, at some sixty or seventy yards' distance. Before we had time to interfere, even by a word, one of our companions fired both barrels of his shot-gun at the roebuck, and then turning round towards us he burst out laughing, saying:

"That will make it run, I know."

And in truth it did, for the buck was lost to view in a minute.

We never gave the incident more than a moment's reflection, and I merely remarked that it was a waste of powder and shot, for I never thought that the pellets at the distance they had been fired could have inflicted even a slight wound on the animal. On the next day, however, as we were having the hounds in a wood in the neighbourhood of the fern common where the roebuck had been fired at, I became aware from the post I had taken outside the covert that something was going on inside it which needed some investigation; for, the hounds, which were merrily "proclaiming" but a moment before, had stopped suddenly, and I could hear the "worry" beginning.

"Some wounded hare they have got hold of," I thought; and I dived into the wood instantly to pick it up.

It was some time before I could reach the place, the covert being very thick, brambly, and thorny, but at last I got near enough to perceive what was the matter. The hounds had set upon a wounded roebuck, and pulled it down, and it was just giving up its last breath when I turned up. I drove the dogs away, not without trouble, for I was a comparative stranger to them, and, in fact, they would not be denied, and they "charged" so persistently that I had to put my gun down, and breaking up a strong branch, I had to lay it about me as hard as I could before they would let the now dead animal alone.

By that time my friends, attracted to the spot by the noise, had come up ; we dragged out the roebuck, and then we examined him. One of its forelegs was shattered completely below the knee, and this had evidently been done partly by the shot fired the night before, and then the animal must have himself completed the mischief when running away or whilst jumping.

Howbeit, there it was plain that the "random shot" had told but too well, and it was a mere chance that we had found the roebuck again. Had he had strength enough to run to the next wood, where he would have been unmolested, he would have died therein of mortification to a certainty. As it was, he had been at least eighteen hours suffering from his wounds; and I consider that a very thoughtless, cruel, and unseemly thing for a shooter to bring about.

Some men do not think about such consequences, and the recklessness I have seen occasionally displayed by some few (very few, thank goodness !) men who dubbed themselves sportsmen was perfectly astounding. It is that sort of thing that brings shooting into disrepute, and the adversaries to this most manly sport are but too glad of such occasions to revile and deride our pursuit.

The animals that mostly suffer from this recklessness are particularly hares. If hares were suffering from hydrophobia there could not possibly be a stronger *animus* displayed against them. It does not matter how far they pass before the guns, there is sure to be some foolish fellow who, in the exuberance of his animal spirits, will "let fly" at puss, and exult thereat as though he had done something remarkable ! Now I have always advocated leaving hares altogether for the greyhounds, but in those countries where greyhounds are not allowed to be used I should not think

of firing at a hare when past forty or fifty yards; for although I have in my days of experimental foolishness shot some at sixty yards and even farther, I consider such shots unlikely enough to succeed, and therefore I would discountenance the experiments *in toto.*

The same might be said about coursing with weak greyhounds that are palpably unfit to perform their duty creditably and well.

Who has not seen such things happening in the course of his sporting experience? I have, several times.

Once a friend of mine came to me with a new purchase in the shape of a young fawn greyhound bitch, and begged of me to try her. I agreed to do so readily; but I directed my keeper to bring along with us a clever black of my own, much to the disgust of my friend.

"You might leave your dog behind," said he, "and give my little beauty here a chance."

"Yes," I said, "I might; and what if she let go her hare?"

"Oh, but the man I bought her from said she was a sure killer!"

"Every greyhound dealer will tell you the same. In my opinion she is not strong enough yet awhile for her work; but be easy—we will give her a good chance. The black will not be slipped unless the bitch positively and palpably cannot do her part single-handed. Will that please you?"

"Oh yes, that will just do nicely, thanks! I knew you would do the thing handsomely," &c. &c. (*Blarney ad libitum.*)

Meanwhile we had left the house and entered the meadows, where the ground was perfectly bare and open, each meadow being of a good size and surrounded by

wide ditches. I was the first "discoverer." In a tuft of rank grass, by the side of a mole-hill, was a hare—a beauty —in her form.

"Are you ready?" I said to my friend; "here is one."

"All right; go on," said he.

So I kicked pussy out of its snug home, and off it went like a bolt from a catapult, across the meadow, down the bank, and up the other side of the ditch, in a twinkling, with the bitch after her and evidently meaning business. She however was, as might have been expected, inexperienced: she blundered at the ditch, landed on the opposite side before the hare, then turned round and floundered in. But concerning this, at present, I need not enter into any details; suffice it to say that about a hundred yards farther the bitch had her first wrench, and a good one, too; but the hare was wide awake and strong, and she subsequently led the bitch such a dance within fifty or sixty yards that they appeared like playing at shuttlecock. The hare, however, had evidently suffered serious damage in the first onset, for it did not attempt boldly to run for it until it had completely pumped the young bitch, who, with open jaws and gasping breath, finally stood still.

"There! you see now," I said to my companion; "what had I told you?"

Meanwhile the black had been watching the performaace with summersaults innumerable at the end of his slips, and it was all the man could do to hold him; at last he had been pacified, and, with his eyes starting out of their sockets and his jaws firmly clenched he watched the hare now fairly bolting.

"Let him go now!" I called out.

And away he bounded. It was a treat to see the professional way with which he entered upon the business on

hand. Clearing the ditches and racing away, he soon got within reach, and with his usual clever dodge he dashed his head under the hare, sent puss flying up in the air, and before she had time to recover her legs it was all *u p* with her.

Now had we not had the dog of course we should have lost the hare; but that was a minor consideration. Far more important was it not to let the wounded animal get away and die a lingering death. Had we trusted to the bitch alone we, too, then would have been guilty of "a random shot."

And now to come to shooting once more. I do not believe in long-range cartridges, because they are uncertain in their action. Sometimes they will kill at unheard-of distances, but in the vast majority of cases they do not bag. However, they have a great reputation, and the complacent manner which a man assumes when he slips two long-range cartridges in his gun, tells plainly that he thinks he will do grand things with them, and believes in them implicitly. He does certainly blaze them away with right good will so long as his stock will last, and he attributes his want of success to his want of skill. I don't. I think it is a downright waste of powder and shot. Of course, it is good for trade, therefore *inclinons-nous* before the *Dieu du commerce*; but nevertheless such trumpery affairs induce "random shooting," and ought therefore to be discarded by every right-minded sportsman. If you cannot come near enough to your game to kill it at those distances which by experience you know your gun commands well, abstain altogether from firing—that is the best course to pursue.

By almost every shooter long-range cartridges have been, for tradition's sake, tried for wild-fowl shooting. Now here again I have had plenty of experience, and my expe-

rience goes against the use of those trade inventions. I should always advise an intending wildfowler to use a strong gun of large bore and corresponding breech, capable of carrying handsomely a good dose of shot, and I would have him eschew any light gun, with the hope that by loading it with long-range cartridges he would succeed with the fowl. It is a mistake. As the birds are tough, and generally pass rather far from the shooter, it is of course a *sine quâ non* that the shot should be able to bundle them over where they are; this a large-bore gun loaded well will do, with a certainty of execution quite as regular as the ordinary guns when brought to bear in the turnips on partridges; but should you be induced to fire away wire concerns and the like, you will do well to provide them wholesale, for the average is not much more than one telling shot to twenty wasted ones.

These cartridges are, besides being so useless, extremely dangerous to employ, on account of their remaining whole occasionally, and acting like bullets, when they may go a very long way, and then hit a man maybe a hundred yards or more away. I have seen such cases, and have experienced some myself. Now it is pleasant enough to watch a fellow shooting at a duck and missing it handsomely with both barrels, but when the fellow's shot comes rattling down like hail on your face or on your back, it is rather apt to make you shift your quarters. Therefore I hold that such inventions are not only practically useless but highly dangerous, and they ought never to be employed but when and where the ground is open and perfectly clear from other parties. So much for the long-range cartridges sold by the trade. They have been the cause of more mischief amongst game than any other devices, and that is all the credit they can lay a claim to. I do not mean to

say that they do not occasionally kill—I have acknowledged that they sometimes do; but what I contend is that one bird bagged for perhaps half-a-dozen wounded ones that will not be bagged is a bird dearly purchased; or when the birds are wisely fired at singly, I contend that to fire at twenty consecutive birds before one is brought to hand is, to say the least, an unseemly waste of ammunition.

There is more random shooting practised against wildfowl than against any other kind of living birds or animals; but then for this the wildfowl are themselves to blame. As they *will* travel in flocks it is sometimes hard to pick out a bird, and often its immediate neighbours come in for their share of the peppering. That cannot always be helped, and as they will often obstinately keep very far from the guns, it occasionally happens that half the "company" being covered by the "spread," feel more or less the effect of the fusillade—the more the pity for humanity's sake, but the more the merrier, will the puntsmen say on their own behalf; so that there again self-interest and tender feelings are at variance.

Such mercenary considerations, however, ought to have no weight with those who sport for the love of the thing. A gentleman and a sportsman never fires but when he has a good chance of bagging, and when game birds are in a lump he lets them go and bides his time, for not only does he discard random shooting himself as far as he is personally concerned, but a professed "random" shooter is an abomination in his estimation.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF SPORT.

IT is "strange but true" that a sportsman, and particularly a shooter, needs often no other introduction than his own particular love of sport in order to find favour in other shooters' eyes, even though he may be in other respects a complete stranger to the latter. Thus it is that in my own case, owing to my passion for the gun, I have been often asked to shooting-parties by gentlemen whose very names were unknown to me previously to their very kind invitations.

This brotherhood among sportsmen is indeed the more remarkable, inasmuch as the skill of one member of the company not unfrequently "riles" his companions; but all goes off, nevertheless, in good-humour, and foolish would be the man who should bear a grudge towards another because the latter might have repeatedly "wiped his eye."

As a rule, Continental sportsmen are more readily hospitable towards strangers than Britishers, and it is quite true to say that, in this respect, they "do these things differently in France," and elsewhere on the Continent. In proof of this, I may relate what occurred to myself during my stay in Belgium. I was taking a stroll along the sea-shore there, when I met with a con-

genial spirit in the shape of a burly French gentleman, who, with gun and dog, was also trying to circumvent sea-fowl.

To tell the truth, when I first spied him in the distance, and ascertained beyond a doubt that he also had a gun, I wished with all my heart that he could have been somewhere else. However, as on drawing near to him I perceived that in years he was by far my senior, I grew more sociable, and we had a "confab."

"*Il n'y a pas beaucoup d'oiseaux*," said he.

Now, considering that we were scarcely half a mile from Ostend, and that there is a pretty smart traffic going on there on the sands between the town and the next village, it was not very wonderful that birds did not choose *this* particular spot as a resting-ground; and so I remarked to my new friend, who thereupon looked upon me evidently as a very clever fellow.

"Ah! I should never have thought of that," said he, "yet it is plain enough; so you think that farther on we will find some birds?"

"Certainly," I replied.

And accordingly we put our "best feet foremost," and made a flying start. I shall not delay to talk about the sport. We came back at night very tired, very hungry, and very thirsty; my good friend and I dined together, we exchanged cards, and we parted more friendly than ever.

So far so good.

Well, time went on, and I had almost forgotten my sleek companion, when, a fortnight later, I received from him a letter inviting me to pay him a visit at his residence near Dunkerque.

"We have shoals of wildfowl here; we shoot ducks

by the score; and if you are at liberty to come, you will oblige me." Thus said his note.

I resolved to go, and wrote to notify my acceptance of the invitation.

Dunkerque is, as the crow flies, but thirty miles or so from Ostend, so I roughly estimated that by rail the journey, at the utmost, could not possibly take me more than two hours to perform. I never was more mistaken in my life. I had reckoned without the railway companies. The peculiar *circular* system of the railway lines lengthened out the thirty miles to seventy at least; and ultimately, after a journey of seven-and-a-half hours, I reached my destination.

My host was awaiting the arrival of the train, and we drove to his house together. Whilst dinner was taking place, he told me that the fowl were more abundant than ever, and if I did not feel too tired after my journey we should go to the "hut" after dinner. I was extremely knocked up on my arrival, but whether the satisfaction of having at last arrived safely to port had restored my equanimity (which had been sorely ruffled during the day), or whether the show of sport tempted me and made me forget my sufferings, I cannot decide; but I really felt equal to any emergency, and stated my firm resolution to remain up all night at the hut if necessary.

Accordingly, after a last cigar, we departed. The night was clear and frosty, the moon shone brilliantly, and everything looked as fit (for the kind of sport we were going to enjoy) as could be. We crossed some downs, and finally reached the hut in safety.

This hut, by-the-way, is about the best and most comfortable it has ever been my lot to shoot from. It is substantially built of bricks; and the comforts of the interior

are fully equal to that of any house, with the exception that there was no fire, but there being double doors we were enabled to have a light, to smoke, to chat in a low tone, to read, &c., while the keeper, warmly wrapped up in some horse-rugs, was between the double doors, keeping watch over the pond.

The decoy-birds had been placed beforehand, and my friend assured me that we could trust the man implicitly.

"This fellow," said he, "has shot I may say thousands of ducks, teals, geese, and other fowl, in his life. He used to have a straw hut of his own in which you would not have put a dog, but in which he nevertheless spent twenty hard winters watching for the flights. Somehow he had such good birds for decoys, or managed them so cunningly, that he always shot by himself more than all the other decoy-men and amateurs put together. But it is only fair to inform you that old Simon's gun is a 'caution;' it is of such large bore that you can drop a penny into the barrel easily. Where he picked it up I do not know, but there is one thing certain, and that is that he never would part with it on any terms whatever. I have known it to kill fifteen ducks at one shot. It is, in fact, a regular business tool; and when we used to hear the flights 'whistling' their way towards Simon's, and when we heard his call-ducks getting excited, and then stopping their 'calling,' we knew that a flock had settled near his hut, and after the boom of the fellow's weapon very little share remained to us."

Just then the keeper rapped quietly on our door. We took up our guns and went noiselessly to the outside door, whose shooting slides, carefully greased, had been shoved back; and after some few seconds spent in getting our eyes accustomed to the comparative darkness without, we saw five wild ducks pluming and shaking themselves on

the water near the decoys. The wild birds were not together in a lump, so I signed to my companion that if he would take charge of the three that were on his side I would settle my two. He nodded assent, and we quietly passed our gun-barrels through the apertures and took aim. Then at his whistle we fired, and all the birds remained quite dead on the water.

Old Simon then went out with a long bamboo pole fitted at one end with a strong landing-net, and fished up the game. This done he came in again to resume his watching, and by-and-by we again heard his signal, came forward as before, and again fired with success. Then, the night being far spent, and no more birds favouring us with their visit, we beat a retreat.

I remained three days with my French friend, and we killed a tremendous lot of birds at the hut. Nor were we singular in that respect, for all the neighbouring "hutters" shot loads too, and the neighbouring markets got literally glutted. A couple of ducks could be had in the shops for eighteenpence, or thereabouts. Subsequently I heard that the whole of the marshes in the north of France had been swarming with wildfowl, so that I consider I was lucky indeed in having been invited to take my share of the fun, and this I may reasonably attribute to the subject of this article—viz. the kindly feelings engendered among sportsmen by a similarity of tastes in the matter of sport.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN A STALKING-HORSE.

THE passion for sports of all kinds was in my family for many generations, and, true to the blood, I took to sports from my earliest infancy as naturally as a duckling takes to water. Even when a child I was allowed to do pretty nearly as I liked, and my parents and connections, being rather proud of my youthful tendencies, encouraged them to their utmost and refused me nothing that was reasonable.

When a very little boy my knowledge of sporting affairs was already very extensive, and I could tell a good dog the moment he entered a field, to the great admiration of John, one of our keepers. Of course during my youth he, having been detailed to my special charge, resorted to all sorts of dodges and devices in order to procure me plenty of practice with the gun, and some of these devices were amusing enough; but our stalking-horse was the most delightful and most entertaining piece of business I ever had a hand in.

The idea originated by my having seen in an old book a print of a so-called stalking-horse. There was an old jade, hardly able to walk seemingly, going towards a flock of curlews and other wildfowl, whilst a man, keeping on the off-side of the horse, was getting his gun ready for a

shot. I pondered over this picture for a long while, and I wished we had had an old screw to try the dodge with.

Once I took our gardener's donkey, under the pretence of a ride, and I then, when out of sight, tried what he could do for a stalking animal. All went well for some time, he rather preferring being led than ridden, the lazy brute! But when, by-and-by, I came to fire a shot at an unsuspecting magpie, the donkey struck out and bolted so unexpectedly, that had the reins been twisted round my arm instead of merely resting upon it, I would infallibly have been dragged to the ground, and at any rate I would certainly have been maimed, if not actually killed. As it was I was pulled down on my face. I never tried stalking after that with a live coadjutor. But I thought that if I could make some imitation, however rough, of a horse, it would serve my purpose as well, and I resolved to try. How I was to do it I had no idea, and I was therefore sadly puzzled as to how I was to carry my plan into execution, when one of my uncles with his son happened to pay us a visit.

Now my cousin was, if anything, still more "shooting-struck" than I was, and when I opened my mind to him on the subject of my new stratagem, he forthwith declared that the thing should be done "just for a lark, if nothing more." We took John into the secret. This worthy shook his head incredulously, and stated that "them things were rum ones to deal with, and that he had not much faith in them; but of course, if we wished to try, why he was agreeable, and would do all he could."

This being settled, we collected all our pocket-money, and, unknown to anyone but the keeper, we invested £1 in buying a horse's skin from a knacker. John then proceeded to fit it with some wickerwork inside, so as to give it as

nearly as possible the appearance and outline of a horse pasturing. On the left side, according to our suggestions, he cut two openings for us to fire through.

When it was all ready, there being just then a large number of curlews in the meadows, my cousin got into the hind legs, I took the front legs, and we had a rehearsal in the yard.

My first impression was that it was very unpleasant to be confined in a horse's skin even temporarily, and, moreover, it was not easy to manage the "working" of the stratagem without some practice, for if one of the bearers went too fast he nearly knocked the other off his feet, and *vice versâ*.

Meanwhile the affair had got bruited about the household, and we were greeted with roars of laughter whenever any false manœuvre nearly brought us to mother earth.

Howbeit after this, our preliminary canter, we took our guns inside with us, and we set out in earnest, and in a business-like manner.

At first, as we were going along pretty smoothly, I ventured to hint that we were getting on wonderfully well. I had scarcely expressed this opinion than, as we were turning out of the lawn into the open, a terrific gust of wind laid hold of the stalking concern broadside, and, what with the fear of our guns going off and the difficulty of seeing our way clear before us, we were driven, in spite of all our efforts, into a ditch, wherein I tumbled first, and of course dragged my companion.

When we felt the cold water we at once let go, and off went our artificial decoy, tumbling, and jumping, and rolling all over the meadows, until it stuck headforemost into a ditch, and there remained, with its hind part sticking

up in the air and waving to and fro as the gusts of wind swept over it.

Meanwhile we had managed to scramble out of our drain, and with consternation we looked from afar at our unruly steed; then we took a survey of each other's habiliments and appearance, and finally we burst out laughing. My *confrère* in his fall had managed to stick his face into the soft mud, and his countenance was a picture. I was in a sad mess too myself, and our guns' barrels were full of mud up to the breech.

Since then, I have never been in another horse's skin to be used as an artificial stalking-horse, and, moreover, I have no wish whatever to try to circumvent wildfowl by means of such an unwieldy, heavy, and foul-smelling apparatus, but we, afterwards, got a rare concern made up, of which concern I will speak anon.

CHAPTER XVII.

GROUSE-DRIVING AS A SPORT.

IT is perfectly true that, owing to the wily nature of grouse, "driving" must occasionally be resorted to in order to bag them; but that "driving" (a mere expedient after all) should be enthusiastically denominated "the sport" *par excellence*, must be simply a joke.

Sport, as we have been taught to understand it, consists:

1st. In seeking game on its own ground, and, in so doing, giving it free scope to use its wits for eluding our approach (this first condition is a *sine quâ non*, and constitutes, in fact, nine-tenths of the sport).

2ndly. When we have succeeded in getting within range, we must be clever enough to kill our game in whatever manner and direction it chooses to try to escape our guns.

Now in "driving," the first of these conditions is entirely discarded, and the second is only partly fulfilled, inasmuch as speed alone, and that in one direction only, *i.e.* towards the shooters, is sought to be allowed to the birds as a means of escape; therefore driving cannot be classed as sportsmanlike.

If we enter into each condition separately, we will see that to succeed in reaching game on its own ground, as described above, it requires in the sportsman a personal

knowledge of the haunts and habits of his game. Now the "driver" of our day need not know where his grouse live, neither does he need to know their habits, their tricks, and how to thwart them. The birds' wiles are driven away, so to speak, by the irresistible *cordon* of beaters; consequently a successful killer of grouse (under the system of "driving") may be a good shot; but if we adhere strictly to the letter of the definition he cannot be called *per se* a sportsman, however successfully he may knock over his birds when they are driven to him. What constitutes in fact the sportsmanship of shooting grouse? The very difficulty one experiences almost invariably in getting within range of the wary birds. Remove then this difficulty of getting within range of grouse, and all the merit of the thing is done away with. You might as well shoot domestic fowl or turkeys driven over your battery.

That a preserver, who cannot or will not remain a sufficiently long time on his estate to enjoy shooting as an every-day luxury, should kill all his game wholesale in a few days by every means in his power is admissible, on the ground of the gentleman's right to take his own property when he can best do it and as he thinks best; but that this destruction, by means unfair to the game, should be considered as the *ne plus ultra* of sport every sportsman will deny, and it is inadmissible.

"Driving" is simply an expedient, necessary in some cases, but that is no reason why it should be classified as sport, no more than wiring rabbits.

"But 'driving' is fashionable!" exclaim the new school. To this I reply that if some gentlemen are obliged to kill all their grouse in a few days, because they are unable or unwilling to spend more time for the purpose, that is no reason why those who live on their estates should imitate

them and kill everything in the first week. It would be, indeed, *manger son bien en herbe.* What would become of those country sportsmen then during the remainder of the season?

The partisans of "driving" urge that the old birds cannot be got rid of except by "driving" them. Granted. But then they don't pick out the old birds and kill these only. They shoot indiscriminately all that come to their guns. This, it strikes me, is a very queer way of getting rid of the nuisance.

Again, they say that the more birds they kill the more are found the next season. But if such be the case, why, after very successful drive, are the moors *restocked* from live grouse bought from poachers in other counties?

A great deal has been said also in praise of the shooters, about the good generalship which must be displayed to ensure that the drive should be a successful one. I don't see at all that the shooters deserve any praise as far as that particular generalship is concerned. Many of them are guests who perhaps have never in their lives set their foot on the ground before; and as for the owners, they as a rule don't trouble about that sort of thing. The head-keeper does it all; therefore if there be any credit, to him, and him alone, is it due.

The difficulty experienced by the shooters to hit driven grouse has been amply enlarged upon, and has been made almost an excuse for "driving;" but considering that the great speed attained by the birds constitutes the only difficulty against which the shooters have to contend, surely they cannot decently find fault with that. The poor birds have no other chance whatever to escape. They must all, with very few exceptions, pass within range, and their only chance of safety lies in their speed and the unskilfulness of

the shooters. Surely this only chance ought not to be grudged them at any rate.

Now as to the system itself—I cannot bring my mind to consider it fair in any way whatever. Hiding behind a battery, and firing from behind a mantlet at an unsuspecting and "driven" bird, cannot surely be called sport.

By a singular process of reasoning, the number of birds killed thus is urged as a proof of the "sport" of the thing. I cannot understand such a sophism. If it be unfair to kill one bird from an ambush, it must be a thousand times worse to kill a thousand birds.

As to the cruelty of the sport, if a "driver" of the period were to be told that a certain sportsman of the old school, whilst shooting over his setters or pointers, makes it a point to leave all his birds, dead or wounded, where they fall, until he (the sportsman) has beaten and shot over all his ground, would he (the driver) not be the first to cry "shame" on this man for cruelly allowing his wretched wounded birds to die a lingering death, exposed to the ardent rays of the sun, or with a downpour of rain and sleet falling upon their mangled bodies for hours together before they are picked up, and their sufferings put to an end? Would he call this man a sportsman?

Yet fashionable shooters do all this every time they "drive," and they call it sport!

With regard to the success, in point of numbers, which some men attain when shooting driven grouse, the number of birds killed does not prove *per se* the skill of the shooter, because nothing is known of the number of shots that have been fired for comparison with the number of heads of game that have been killed.

A sportsman who in the open, over Don and Ponto, shoots ten birds with a dozen barrels is far more clever than

the "driver" who kills five hundred grouse in a thousand shots or more from behind a wall. There the whole distinction remains—one is a sportsman, the other is simply a shooter, more or less skilled.

Commercially speaking, "driving," when carried to excess, as it has been occasionally, like all other abuses, carries its own punishment along with it. Such enormous quantities of grouse make their simultaneous appearance in the market that it gets quite glutted, and even the very poor may then eat grouse. So far so good. As far as the public is concerned this is but a cause for congratulation; but the game preservers must make a very wry face over it when a consignment of game fetches say but £30 or £40, instead of £250.

Howbeit, were my game to be killed in no other way, I would hang up my guns for good, and commission my keeper to perform the unpleasant task, for shooting would be no longer a pleasure; it would become a positive labour, and therefore no relaxation. I would no more think of firing a thousand shots in one day by way of amusement than I would dream of racing on foot with a horseman by way of refreshing myself.

In the discussion of the actual performance of "driving," some shooters have been looked upon by some admiring writers as models of strength, perseverance, skill, and endurance, for (*sic*) not having got their fingers or their shoulders hurt, and for standing the explosions of so many hundreds of shots without being driven crazy by the noise! That the shooters' fingers did not get abrased only proves that the fowling-pieces they used were good guns, whose triggers did not shake as some Brummagem concerns would have done. That their shoulders did not get sore proves that the guns were no kickers, or that they were properly

loaded, or both; for all that sort of thing, the shooters deserve not the slightest credit. And as for the brain nerve that can endure the "din" of so many shots, I sincerely congratulate, not the shooters, but their attendants, who had to bear the "din," and who proved that they could stand it without going mad. As for the shooters themselves, I warrant that if they were fully intent upon their work that was before them, they noticed but little the reports of their own guns. A sportsman only sees his game fall or escape; he is perfectly unconscious, generally speaking, of the "din" of his gun. At any rate, though I have fired guns many many thousands of times, I have never noticed their report. Some town writers may think this very strange, but should they inquire on the subject from any practical sportsmen they will find my statement confirmed by every one of them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BOG-TROTTING.

FROM the very moment that I was first entrusted with a gun I experienced a fondness for marsh-shooting, and my weakness for snipe in due time amounted nearly to a passion.

How is it that all young shooters delight in "*bog-trotting?*" Is it because they can there get very muddy, and therefore look altogether business-like, and up to any amount of hardship? or is it simply because the greatest *duffer* must eventually succeed in bagging something in a marsh that is fairly stocked with water-fowl?

This assertion may appear strange to the inexperienced, but it is a fact (well known to all marsh-shooters) that water-fowl are either very hard or very easy to bag. The state of things depends in a great measure on the weather. Sometimes the birds will lie like stones and rise like hay-stacks; at other times they will be so shy that it will require all the shooter's cunning to manage to come within range of them, and then, when he has succeeded in doing so, they will oppose all their wily dodges to his skill. A "fresh" snipe, on a moderately stormy day, is by no means easy to bag; whereas a "tired" bird, on a quiet day, is as easy to shoot as a barn-door fowl; therefore, as such days

and such birds are bound to turn up in the course of every marsh season, the merest tyro must occasionally succeed.

Success in shooting, as in everything else, is a great incentive to perfecting oneself; and very often a snipe, successfully and judiciously knocked over by an apprentice hand, has made of the boy an enthusiastic sportsman at heart.

Now a gentleman who, at a great expense, preserves his manor for his own and his friends' enjoyment, would hardly like to let his own boys or his nephews scamper about all over his fields and coverts for the sake of their learning how to shoot. But if there be a small marsh handy, depend upon it you will see the youngsters pottering amongst its reeds and floundering in its ditches as soon as ever "the powers that be" grant them the use of a gun; in fact, marshes may be fairly termed the nurseries of our sportsmen.

A boy who is taken out partridge-shooting, and who has had no previous experience of it, as a rule gets thoroughly sick and disheartened; for this sport to him is but a hollow mockery, and very tiring to boot. He is worn out with fatigue by following the coveys; then, when he sees the dogs on point he experiences a singular oppression of the chest and a trembling of the hands that are by no means calculated to improve his shooting, even if we admit that he would be able to shoot straight. Then the birds rise with a *whirr* that makes the youngster's heart jump into his mouth! Mayhap he will be so knocked all of a heap that he will not even think of firing his gun; but should he have enough mechanical instinct left to think of delivering his two barrels, rest assured that he will not hit anything, and if he does it will be a mere fluke or an accident, and in nine cases out of ten nothing

will fall; this, occurring repeatedly, will disgust the young learner.

Now place the same young fellow in a fair marsh, and note how different things will look. First of all, as the shooter must see where he steps, he does not notice so much the distances he walks; then, as he expects every moment that some bird will jump up, he does not experience that anxiousness to get quickly forward that a youngster often feels when walking up to coveys of partridges; in short, in the marsh, he must needs walk deliberately, and, among the many birds that he will eventually flush, he *must* bag some. The consequence of this naturally is that, when he comes home the boy feels proud, and emphatically declares that he never enjoyed himself so much in his life, whereas he would as likely vote partridge-shooting a bore.

The great variety of birds to be met with in marshes is another great incentive to pursuing this sport; a teal, a duck, a moorhen, and a couple of snipe look nicer than five partridges. Of the teal, the duck, the moorhen, and the two snipe there are different tales to be related by the shooter to account for their presence in his bag, whereas the five partridges would have got there in the usual tame way.

When I began bog-trotting, snipe puzzled me. I tried to follow them with my gun, but when I fired they invariably answered the bang-bang of my gun by a shrill call, amounting pretty much to a sneering laugh, and which to my uninitiated ear sounded pretty like stigmatising my weak and unsuccessful attempt as "cheek." There was one in our marsh that I had the pleasure of firing at every morning for a week. This daily performance was fast growing upon me as a habit. I punctually made my ap-

pearance at nine, called at her pool, found her at home; she rose regularly with a dash to the east, one to the west, a couple to the north, and the rest anywhere. Now, as I had been told impressively that I was *not* to shoot where she was, but *where* she was going, it was not easy to guess where that particular point, at a particular time, might be; so that I was fairly bothered, and I believe I shot in turns towards all points of the compass. Of course at each shot she laughed, and cried out, "Cheek!" I was growing desperate when, one fortunate day, she met with her end. It was no fault of mine, I am certain; and in fact the keeper who accompanied me in my rambles, and to whom this daily incident was most entertaining, told me respectfully that I was not to blame—that it was the snipe's own fault.

"She flew," he said, "right in your shot."

Since this memorable event a good many snipe "have flown into my shot," for I soon discovered the knack of knocking them over.

In this sport the art of loading one's gun properly goes a long way towards making a good bag. My want of success at first was attributable, not only to my want of experience in the actual shooting of the birds, but also to my gun not being loaded in such a manner as to make the business easier. The fowling-piece given me was (very properly) chosen of a very light weight, calculated not to break down my youthful strength; it was a 20-bore gun, with an ordinary length of barrels. Now, this gun, with an ordinary cartridge, carried very fairly up to forty yards, and it kept the shot very tight, *i.e.* it did not scatter more than a square yard or so. This was all very well for ordinary shooting; but when I blazed away at a snipe just rising fifteen yards from me, of course I either cut it

into shreds or else I missed it clean, on account of the shot being, at that distance, almost like a bullet; and I had not the nerve to wait till the bird was far enough to give me the full benefit of the "spread" of my charges of shot—in a word, I had taken to snap-shooting, and I meant to stick to it. Evidently there was something in my gunning affairs that wanted looking to. I revolved the matter in my youthful mind, and forthwith I instituted experiments with sundry cartridges. I found, then, that up to twenty yards one-third of the cartridge (in volume) filled with powder, and the remaining two-thirds filled with No. 10 shot, answered beautifully with my gun, as the "spread" of the shot was, at that distance, about equal to that of my ordinary cartridges at forty yards. I sallied forth then, and I became a noted snipe-shot. A couple of years after, and another heavier and larger gun was provided for me, and with it I succeeded still better.

Now everyone uses 12-bore guns. With cartridges doctored as I have just hinted, anybody ought, with very little practice, to be able to knock over snipe under ordinary circumstances.

Some shooters use cartridges with more powder than shot, and the result is almost as good as it is by my system. I have tried both. But in heavy weather the smoke occasioned by the greater quantity of powder hangs so thick and so heavy that it materially interferes with the delivery of the second barrel, if it be needed. Since this was written the Schultze powder has been introduced to my notice, and I have shot with it extensively. It is, in my opinion, the coming sporting gunpowder, as it kills as well as, and better than, ordinary powder, does not recoil so much, and produces but little smoke.

Some shooters say that they shut one eye when aiming at

a snipe. I tried it, but I could not "follow" the flight of the bird.

I must say, in truth, that among those sportsmen who told me that they found it beneficial to use only one "peeper," only one or two were really good shots; so that, on the whole, I strongly suspect that my plan is the best. I keep both eyes open, and if I had three, I would not, by any means, think the third, one too many when having to deal with an erratic, zigzagging snipe.

Of course there are cases in which a snipe will fly away from you, when you may shoot it in the one-eye-shut style if you are inclined; but that is a matter of habit or fancy.

As a general rule it takes both eyes to make out *where* a snipe is going, and brains to send the shot *there.*

Much has been said on the subject of the accoutrements required for bog-trotting. A good deal of praise has been bestowed on gutta-percha boots, but they are dangerous wares.

If a man drives to a hut in the marshes, and remains there inactive, he may wear ordinary long waterproof boots with comfort; but the man who intends beating the said marshes would find long boots troublesome. As far as I am concerned, I go out marsh-shooting with ordinary shooting-boots; but I take these off, as well as my wet socks or stockings, as soon as I have done walking, and I substitute dry ones in their stead. Thus I am enabled to walk as lightly as if I were in the fields. It is surprising that such heavy, cumbersome contrivances as long boots have been devised and actually used by sportsmen for the very sport which by its nature offers the most troublesome ground to be trodden on. It is bad enough to have to pull out one's feet from sticking, holding mud, without having, moreover, the additional weight of long boots to deal with.

I have always done without such contrivances; I always used the precaution I have just mentioned of changing my wet feet-coverings; and, thank heaven, although I have now for a good many years been a "wild fowler," I have always been in good health and spirits, and never felt more tired after a day's snipe-shooting than after a day's partridge-shooting, whereas my heavily-booted companions frequently had to give up their day's sport through sheer fatigue when only half the day had gone by.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOGS FOR BOG-TROTTING.

IF ever a particular breed of dogs proved its utter uselessness in any particular circumstance, that of the retrievers proper must carry off the palm when employed in bog-trotting. I state this feelingly, as I have repeatedly experienced a singular longing to pepper with shot the retrievers which it was my lot to possess or to see used in bog-trotting, on account of their proving such utter lumbering failures. Yet some fanatics will insist on using them, and on recommending their use to others. Be that as it may, no argument will convince me that these men are not, in some way, interested in the breeding or training of these animals. However, let any unprejudiced man like me, totally unconcerned (monetarily speaking) in the matter, who may have had experience on the subject, come forward, and see if he does not state that my unmitigated disgust is well founded.

Neither am I here speaking of one particular dog. No man can judge of a species by considering one individual only of the breed. I have had half-a-dozen retrievers proper, I have shot over, perhaps, half-a-dozen more belonging to friends of mine, all of which were very fair specimens of their tribe. I was most unprofitably employing skill and

exerting my energies, for, out of what I knocked over I lost a good eighth, owing to the dogs floundering about anywhere, too far or too near, but at any rate retrieving very slowly, and, as I have just said, sometimes retrieving nothing at all. This is perfectly sickening.

In marshes, if a bird is not swiftly "culled" and brought to hand, its scent is rapidly absorbed by the surrounding moisture—the more so if the bird chanced to fall in some water—when it is virtually a lost bird, unless the dog happens to come quickly to the spot, and scent it before its life is extinct and its last struggles are over. To do this properly I do not believe there is in the world a better breed of dogs than Irish water-spaniels.

"Oh! but they are such obstinate animals!" I hear some fashionable shooter exclaim.

Well, for the matter of that, we all need to be slightly obstinate, and this in a water-dog, instead of being put down as a vice, ought to be considered as a virtue; and I hope no one will contradict me when I say that when once an Irish water-spaniel has seen a bird fall, that bird he *must* find, and he will not come back to you without it. That is more than can be said of nine hundred and ninety-nine retrievers out of a thousand. As for having "nose," where, may I ask, is the retriever proper that can compete with an Irish water-spaniel? In fact, from every point of view, the latter is decidedly "cock of the walk." I speak not from *parti pris*, I merely say what I have seen; and the very fact of my having deliberately shot over more than a dozen good retrievers, proves that I was more than willing to give them a fair trial, and therefore I think I could not be said to be more partial to one breed than to the other.

An Irish water-spaniel, besides being a better retriever than the new-fangled dogs whose business is exclusively

that of retrieving, has another great advantage over them—viz. he can hunt. A retriever, allowed to hunt, does not do so properly, as it ought to be done; he flounders, that is all. A water-spaniel who knows what is what, tells you plainly, by means of that bright glance we all know so well, "I say, governor, here is a bird here. Look out!" He makes half a point, sees you are ready, dashes in, up comes the bird, bang goes the gun, and down comes Mrs. Snipe. That is the way to do it. When a man is young and "brisk" he can have no better dog than a water-spaniel for his bog-trotting expeditions. But of course he must keep well up near the dog, and be ready at the first "stiffening of the tail and cocking of the ears."

But by-and-by, when years and long tramps, together with perhaps rheumatism, begin to tell on the shooter's constitution, then he begins to find that the spaniels are too lively and too forward for him. Let him then procure a steady marsh setter or pointer, "retrieving preferred," as advertisements set forth, and I guarantee he will enjoy himself. A good marsh (to employ a well-known saying) is a source of joy, not "for ever," but for so long as the season lasts and you are allowed to shoot. Every day some new arrivals visit it, every hour you may beat it—you will never come home empty-handed; whereas when you have shot your coveys, farewell to partridges. Here, near this ditch, you always flush snipe; at the brook, it is rare that you don't find a couple of teal or a duck; in the bogs, jacksnipe, snipe, plovers, curlews, are to be found—wherever you go, you are bound to shoot: it is the sort of shooting where the greatest quantity of powder is burnt, and where one has the greatest pleasure, both with the gun and with the dogs.

A snipe that allows a dog to "stand her still" (if I may

use such an expression), will stand there till you come. It is a treat in itself to see snipe-pointers or setters. My old pointer puts his nose gradually close to the bird, so that he seems to be lying on his muzzle, whilst his stern remains up, and his tail keeps wagging to and fro very warily and slowly all the while. Now, each time I catch sight of him thus situated I cannot help feeling highly tickled, and as he does it for every blessed snipe in the marsh, why it is perfect happiness for me to go with him.

Snipe at odd times are flighty; not only do they not allow the dogs to point, or rather "pin" them down in their momentary rest, but when one rises all the others bolt also. It is at such times that marsh-shooters can see, among all the dogs actually working before them, which are the bad ones and which the good; and, among the latter, the "sensible" as well as good animals. It is not sufficient for a dog to be well built, to be healthy, to be willing, to be gifted with a good nose, and all that, if he has not *sense.* He may be a good dog, but he is still an innocent; and a fool among the lower animals does not succeed better than a fool among men.

It has been said that it takes a man's life to become an expert wild-fowler. Perhaps it does, and perhaps it does not. But there is one thing certain, and that is that it takes three years of hard work in the marshes to make a dog good all round at bog-trotting. Some dogs take to it more readily than others; but the breed, provided it be a genuine, natural, not made-up breed, I can assure my readers, is a matter of no consequence whatever. Some pointers will work as well as any setters in the marshes, and the water (contrary to the statements of *soi-disant* sportsmen) does not in the least frighten them, if they are shown at first that by going into it they will be rewarded by finding

game. The same may be said of ourselves, and, as an instance of it, I may state that a friend of mine, a most supercilious man in matters of dress and cleanliness, propriety, and so forth, who used to tell me frequently that he could not understand my going into the marshes and getting so dirty and muddy for the sake of a few birds, having been prevailed upon once to come down to the river-side, forgot his notions so completely that he eventually waded into the water up to his knees in order to secure a "cripple" in the shape of a teal with a broken wing.

So it is with us. What we do not actually see we can neither enjoy or understand. Give a man plenty of game and he will take to shooting. Show a pointer birds that lie well, and he won't mind if he has to get well splashed or wet before he can get near them. Again, a pointer in a muddy marsh keeps cleaner than a setter; but this, on the other hand, is perhaps more than counterbalanced by the natural inclination of all long-haired dogs for water.

Taken all in all I think both breeds may be used, and that the choice may be left entirely to the shooter's fancy for either breed. I have had scores of dogs, and I cannot say that I saw any perceptible difference in the working of either. Of course, sportsmen will have favourites—example the old pointer I have mentioned above; but what had made the old fellow so very clever is the fact that he was a more constant companion to me than any other, and that he had *sense*. But a setter would have turned out as well, if similarly treated; I have had and known several which were a credit to themselves and to their owners.

In conclusion, I should advise members of the bog-trotting fraternity never to start for a day's marsh-shooting without, first, rag and cleaning-apparatus or rod; secondly, plenty of cartridges. The cleaning-rod can be made of iron,

and constructed so as to close together like a fan, in such a way that it does not weigh much, neither does it take much room when carrying it about; and it comes very handy, especially in marshes, when the damp of the atmosphere soon clogs the breech and inside of the barrels by acting on the residue of the burnt powder, especially when such firing takes place. I recommend taking a good number of cartridges, because when snipe do come to marshes, they usually come in regular tribes; and if you are short of ammunition, when meeting plenty of game, you are liable to use strong language, reflecting in no measured terms on your own simplicity; and a sportsman, worthy of the name, ought to be ready for all emergencies.

CHAPTER XX.

A WORD ABOUT RETRIEVERS.

I HAVE often wondered at our great want of originality. We are perpetually trying to imitate others, just as if we could not choose our line of action ourselves. That we should follow the fashions in dress as they come and disappear is a thing we cannot well avoid; but that in matters of sport we should blindly follow anyone's opinions, and act up to them, is deplorably true. For instance, let me ask, what can possibly mean the introduction of the retrievers proper, as they are called in this country? Our forefathers had no such dogs, and got on wonderfully well without them. They employed their little spaniels when there was any retrieving to be done, and these spaniels very rarely lost a bird, which is far from being the case with our retrievers of the present day. Then why in the name of all that is sensible, since we have still within our reach the breed of spaniels of our ancestors, why have we allowed ourselves to be saddled with the new, heavy, and often useless breed? Why, because it became fashionable.

It is astonishing how easily we are led to adopt new notions in spite of evidence against their introduction among ourselves. Some years ago a few dog-fanciers

started the new breed of dogs at very high figures. This very fact of offering them on high terms made the dogs quite the "thing" for some of our fashionable shooters. I grant that owing to their large size these dogs look very noble; I admit that some of them are very sagacious, but so are our spaniels; and, in fact, I would challenge any retriever in the world to perform his duties more nimbly, more creditably, and more quickly than a good English or Irish retrieving spaniel. These spaniels are gifted with a far more acute power of scent than the Newfoundlanders. To begin with, therefore, they will scent their game far more quickly than their foreign rivals; then the spaniels are quicker on their legs—in fact, they will run over five times as much ground as the retrievers in the same length of time; consequently they will respectively retrieve five birds against the retriever's one. This has been noticed repeatedly whenever large quantities of game had to be collected, such as at *battues* and after a grouse "drive." In fact, this has been brought to light so very forcibly of late that many grouse-drivers and *battue*-men have already given up their retrievers altogether, and re-adopted the retrieving spaniels. This is a very sensible step. When we shall allow ourselves to think for ourselves, and when we shall be bold enough to adopt what seems good to us in spite of what others may say against it, then truly shall we be able to consider ourselves sensible and independent men.

The very fact that spaniels are better in every respect than retrievers ought to make us give up the latter, even if both classes of dogs were of the same market value. But this is not the case. The comparatively inferior retriever is actually sold at five times the price of the retrieving spaniel. What inconsistency! Fashion, I suppose, must

be paid for; at any rate, the breeders take good care to keep up the prestige by every means in their power. Writers publish their wonderful narratives illustrating the sagacity of the peculiar breed; but they seem quite to forget that everything these retrievers can do is done better, quicker, and cheaper by the spaniels. There is another point, again, to which I would draw the reader's attention—viz. the almost irrepressible hard mouth of the retriever. This defect is sometimes hereditary, and said to be incurable, so much so that some of these dogs are worked with bits! Has anyone ever heard of a spaniel or any other retrieving dog but a "retriever proper" being worked with a bit in his mouth? It is ridiculous.

Again, breaking a retriever is a very serious affair, if we may credit the statements of those who breed and train them. Spaniels don't give such trouble. Any sensible man can train a spaniel to retrieve in a fortnight, and a hard mouth is never hereditary in a spaniel; it is a defect rarely, if ever, to be observed in a well-bred one. The sporting community literally follow the dictates of self-approved leaders with such complete obedience and passiveness that actually the very colour of the retrievers proper was imposed upon sportsmen. This is really so bad that it is actually laughable; the breeders played their cards to perfection when they issued that particular notification of their wishes.

The word was sent: "Henceforth retrieving dogs must be what we have determined upon calling 'retrievers proper;' no other dogs can be allowed to retrieve under pain of its owner being considered not up to the standard of gentility; and, moreover, we decide that the retrievers proper must be wholly black."

The reason for the last part of the "programme" is

obvious, for out of every litter of retriever puppies only one or two will be completely black, and these alone are brought up; all the others, being unfashionable, are drowned, so that the retriever market is thereby prevented from being glutted, and the men who make the breeding and training of retrievers their business have it more in their own hands, and consequently they may ask almost whatever terms they choose from those sportsmen who must be fashionable in their sporting surroundings. As a matter of course these pay more than handsomely for their "whistle." The prices are carried to such a very high figure that many sportsmen who would willingly buy retrievers proper, merely for the sake of doing as others do, must perforce do without them because they cannot afford the sums asked.

As far as the colour of the retriever is concerned, I cannot see any reason at all why they should be entirely black, barring the one I have mentioned above, which is, after all, but a most clever hedging on the part of the breeders. What would it matter, I ask, if a retriever were black and white, or white, or liver and white, or brown, &c.? That a small dog used for shooting in covert should be, as much as possible, chosen of as startling a colour as can be found, is a self-evident duty on the part of the shooter; for, should a cocker be wholly liver coloured, and employed in furze and plantations for shooting rabbits, the chances are that sooner or later one of the guns will floor the unlucky little spaniel, as he is sure to be mistaken for a hare or a rabbit. I have seen scores of such accidents happening to rabbit beagles and spaniels in the course of my shooting experience. Therefore, if such small working dogs be chosen white, or liver and white, or, rather, black and white, so much the better; but a retriever does not

usually beat for the gun, and if he did his size would protect him against his being mistaken for a hare or a rabbit; therefore I contend that, even if employed "spanielling" (excuse the idiom), it would not matter if the retriever were liver or brown coloured. But then even this is not usually done; none but keepers allow their retrievers to spaniel. Therefore the case is inapplicable under any circumstances, and consequently, from a shooting point of view, no harm can possibly happen to a retriever on account of his colour. Then why this extraordinary rule, not to be departed from, that all retrievers *must* be wholly black?

Some dogs, used for retrieving, have hard mouths—*i.e.* they crush their birds. Some sportsmen maintain that this vice is incurable, and assert that the dogs must have inherited this proclivity from their parents. So far as our field-dogs are concerned, there never was a more egregious mistake. All dogs are at first more or less inclined to play with the game that they are allowed to pick up, and if this tendency is not checked they will break the birds and lick the blood. If they repeat this practice, it becomes a habit and a nuisance. Let young dogs fumble game with their noses and lips if they like, but not with their teeth. Never allow them to tear a bird of any kind to pieces; it would serve only to give them a taste for blood. It is proper to let young dogs smell and handle game; it gives them a zest for hunting, and teaches them what scent they are expected to hunt for; but under no pretence whatever need you let them bite into game.

The most extraordinary receipts have been given for the cure of hard mouths in retrieving dogs, among which is the following: To stuff a bird with needles and make the dog fetch it. Of course the needles prick him, that is very

certain; but mark the result: the dog, hurt and astonished, drops the bird, revolves the matter in his mind, then determines to have another try, pricks himself again, drops the bird (for good this time), and walks away deliberately. The next bird you shoot he won't pick up at all, and you have now to coax him to do it, and perhaps he will decline altogether, especially if the needles have hurt him badly.

Another method consists in making the dog retrieve young kittens sufficiently strong to scratch. The theory of this plan is very good, but the practice is wofully deficient, as I can personally testify. When the dog is scratched he either drops the kitten or else kills it right out; it does not in the least influence his more than tight hold on game afterwards. Dogs are not fools; they know as well as we do the difference between a partridge and a kitten, or a rabbit and a cat. They know perfectly well that a cat will fight, but that the rabbit is harmless. Even when running on the trail they know by the scent what animal is before them without having seen it, and that is more than we can tell. Therefore trying to make a dog retrieve his game more softly by making him carry kittens, is an insult to the dog's good sense, and it is, as I can vouch, an unsuccessful process.

Now amongst others I have known it tried on a retriever proper—a hard-mouthed dog, if ever one lived; out of six kittens he killed five. He got so whipped though that he actually carried the sixth alive and well. On this the owner congratulated himself greatly, and thought the cure that time was effected. An hour afterwards the dog was taken out shooting. The first shot, which I had the honour to fire, tumbled over a rabbit. On receiving the order to go the dog flew to the spot and mauled the rabbit so that it was not worth while picking up.

Again I have known a bitch who was so desperately hard-teethed that when she had hold of a hare, whipping, beating, and shaking her would not make her loose her hold. I have seen her lifted bodily from the ground hanging from a hare; yet she would carry any of the kittens from the kitchen to the stable without injuring them.

An authority on the subject says that a hard mouth is incurable in a dog of six months old.

I grant that it is hard to cure, but it can be done, and requires but patience. I have cured half-a-dozen "incurables," and this is how I proceeded: I took the dogs —one at a time of course—into certain fields where I had noticed previously that great numbers of larks were to be found. I kept the dog to heel till the first lark rose, when I gave her a barrel and dropped her. Then putting my gun at half-cock and placing it on the ground, I collared my whip, which till then had been placed in my cartridge-belt, and then I sent the dog to fetch. Of course he would bring the lark in a pulp. I *licked* the dog there and then in a moderate way—not kicking and banging him about—and then let him go, picked up the gun, loaded, and began again, whipping the dog each time the larks were spoiled, holding them to his muzzle afterwards and grumbling at him. Grumbling breaks no bones, but after a whipping a dog pays particular attention to you if you happen to grumble. Well, I found that on an average forty larks cured a dog. I chose larks for several reasons. First of all they can almost always be got in abundance; then they are tender birds, easily spoilt, and therefore a dog has truly a tender mouth when he brings them alive or in a good state to hand; lastly, but not least, larks have no bad scent—as starlings have for instance—besides being much more tender than these pests.

Of course, if after some flogging the dog on another trial has done wrong again, and therefore fearing that he has another whipping in perspective runs away from you, put away your whip and proceed to knock over another lark. The dog will allow you then to collar him; then secure him to your belt by means of a long cord. Henceforth he will be at your mercy. If he growls at you, as some dogs will, particularly old dogs, who might think that they had done away with the whip long before, you must instantly resort to powerful means—put a spiked collar on the dog, and to the ring in the collar fasten a stick. By holding the stick you keep the dog's teeth at a respectful distance from your own flesh, and he may growl and snarl as much as he likes.

A snarling dog, as a rule, is an unprofitable customer, who makes you lose your temper, your time, and your money. I have seen some, though, who turned out prime ones after all. I had one, a setter dog, a most magnificent animal, who gave us a tremendous job to break him; in fact I nearly gave up several times the hope of making anything of him, he was so dreadfully savage at first; but he turned out a good, I may say extra-good retrieving setter after all, and strange to say he dropped his evil habit of growling altogether.

CHAPTER XXI.

NEW SYSTEM FOR JUDGING FIELD-TRIALS.

THE preponderance of elements of luck in all affairs of sport is always a disagreeable feature, the more so when the sport in question is a matter of competition, for then the grumbling when the ill-luck proves of a preventible nature is not only terrible but to some extent quite natural, as some cases are decidedly most aggravating. This being so, it is an admitted motto of the authorities that be to try whenever it is possible to remedy the evil. We want *bonâ fide* sterling worth to win, and "flukers" ought to be at a discount. Now as regards field-trials, many of the flukes that invariably happen under the present system are ascribable to the patent deficiency of the system itself, and I will prove it.

To begin with, treating the working of pointers or setters like that of greyhounds is fundamentally wrong, because the objects in view for each class of dogs are so widely different that working both in the same manner is extremely unsatisfactory.

Two rival greyhounds slipped together at a hare will, from the very fact of being antagonists, *do their very best.* Two strange pointers or setters slipped together, from the very fact of being antagonists, *will do their very worst.*

This has been proved conclusively and flagrantly over and over again, though it required no proof, as every sportsman knows that much, and every dealer is so well aware of the fact that he will take good care never to "try" a pointer or setter he may have for sale with a strange dog. In fact, whereas in coursing the natural tendency of each of the two greyhounds is to stretch himself to the utmost and go faster than the other if he can, the most desirable feature in coursing and the one that insures the best work done; with pointers or setters the rivalry engendered by the presence of an antagonist also induces each dog to stretch himself to the utmost, a desirable feature to some extent, but one which, inducing recklessness in a class of dogs that must keep cool and steady, invariably produces bad results. The jealousy which prompts the spirited greyhound to perform brilliantly against his antagonist, induces the spirited pointer to flush his birds, and brings him gradually to some wild and erratic ranging. His eagerness not to be outrun carries him blindly forward, and he ruins his chance by losing his self-control. Therefore running strange pointers or setters together is an egregious mistake, and if the question at issue be to find the real work that each of the dogs can do and will do if a chance is given him of acquitting himself of his task without any disturbing influences upsetting his equanimity, then I say work the dog *singly*, and you may then judge of his merits and demerits.

Of course this does not apply to the braces, for in that case the dogs are accustomed to one another, and as a rule work admirably together. In fact, the work done by braces is almost invariably the best to be seen at field-trials, *vide*, for instance, Lord Downe's and Mr. S. Price's pointers. Yet as a proof that my present theory is correct, if you take the dogs belonging to such braces and work them

individually with strange dogs you will find again the unwholesome rivalry springing up, and each of these dogs so perfect with his mate may prove a reckless and wild brute with his new companion.

In one word, finding birds, pointing and setting, backing, &c., being a pursuit that requires above all things steadiness (for without steadiness, which is the essence of success in the sport, no dog will prove any good), anything that tends to render the dog desperate and wild is not conducive to showing the dog at his best, and therefore does not bring forth high-class sport.

I know that in order to judge comparative speed and style it is alleged that working two dogs together might be thought desirable, but this is not absolutely necessary. A good judge can form a pretty accurate idea of a dog's form if he sees him alone at work for a quarter of an hour, and certainly, as regards finding out the true worth of the dog, nothing could beat the single-dog judging system. Some might think such a system slow and lacking in interest; and perhaps as regards the latter the objection would not be without some weight; but I contend that although the sight of two setting dogs being worked against one another is certainly more exciting than a single-handed trial, yet as the finding of a true verdict would be more likely to accrue from the working of each dog separately than from the style now in vogue, the former style would be the best to adopt. In fact even for the judge's work the single-dog system would prove immensely superior, for there again the difference between a field-trial and a course is made very startling. In a course the two dogs, from the very nature of the contest, are always very near one another—often too much so in fact; but at any rate their working in its minutest details may be as a rule very satisfactorily watched

and noted by the judge. In a field-trial, on the contrary, both dogs start at a tangent and work independently, and it is only when they happen to cross each other's line in their ranging that their individual working can be reckoned at one and the same time. During the remainder of the running, no man can take at a glance the work done by both dogs. True there are two or three judges provided just because of that contingency; but how often does it happen that when one of the two competing dogs shows signs of pointing all eyes are on him? Judges, reporters, public, everybody is looking at that dog, because the very essence of the fun is only to be enjoyed when the dogs show signs of getting scent; and therefore if you do not watch intently the quick and delicate working which intervenes between the first scent and the point you miss *the* treat of the trial.

This is so irresistible an attraction to all *cognoscenti*, that it may be safely asserted that when a dog evinces signs of a "coming event," nobody but his breaker, perhaps, is minding much what the other dog is about. Therefore having to watch more than one field-trial dog at a time is, I humbly venture to suggest, a mistake, on the ground that it is impossible to do thorough justice to both dogs.

Working a dog singly, on the contrary, would enable the judge or judges (and, by-the-way, one judge would be sufficient) to appreciate *every* good and every bad point; it would give the dogs, individually, a chance to show themselves in their true colours; it would do away with fluking; it would greatly please the dogs' owners, because the real worth of their dogs would be then arrived at, and their animals would neither be interfered with by their rival competitors nor bothered by the breakers who may work the latter. It is not very pleasant, when you have taken

an immense deal of trouble to break a dog in the most perfect style, to find him matched with an indifferent dog, who perhaps, besides, shows a decided antipathy to the new comer, and whose worker, maybe, is a noisy man who shouts, whistles, &c., and so effectually bothers altogether your dog that he is all at sea, and declines to go on. The plan I now beg to propose, I think, would remove all these inconveniences.

It is well to keep, as far as possible, on the safe side of things, and I therefore hereby beg to state that I am not aware that anyone has already proposed this style of working field-trials. If anyone has done so, of course it is my duty to apologise for taking *mon bien où je le trouve*, but, as far as I know, nobody has yet mentioned the subject but myself years ago, in some now forgotten article of mine in a contemporary; at any rate, whatever this idea be worth, I submit it, with due deference, to all field-trialers, and think they will admit that it is a rational and sensible idea. The way in which things ought to be carried on, I take it, ought to be as follows:

1st. Each dog to be worked singly, for a certain length of time, agreed upon beforehand, and the same for all dogs competing.

2ndly. Each dog's work being booked, either by points or in shorthand, in the usual style.

3rdly. A due estimation of the work done by each dog being arrived at, nothing would be easier than to declare the winner at the end of the trials. This would obviate ties, except when two or more dogs would have worked so very much alike that no distinction could be made between their points. Then these might again have each an individual spin to decide the matter. But this would prove a very rare contingency.

In conclusion, I hope some of the field-trialers of weight whom I have the honour to number amongst my friends and acquaintances will take up the matter, and see, say, a small stake run through, just to ascertain how the thing would work. I, for one, would be glad to enter a dog of my own for anything of the sort, and I would soon muster half-a-dozen friends to do the same. This would be satisfactory, because I honestly believe that *we really do not see the best of any pointer or setter by matching him with a strange dog*; therefore, by working him alone we would be enabled to come to a correct estimate of his worth, and *that*, I take it, is the point at issue.

Of course, in the single-handed working, backing would have to be judged either separately or not at all. If judging it be considered indispensable, nothing would be easier than slipping any dog purposely to find game, and then trying the competitors individually with him whenever he comes to a point. There would be no insuperable difficulty there.

Some time after the above article had been published, the following appeared in *The Live Stock Journal and Fanciers' Gazette*:—

THE SINGLE-DOG SYSTEM AT TRIALS.

The *Chicago Field* having quoted the letter by "Snapshot" in our columns, advocating the trials of dogs singly, an American correspondent writes to that journal as follows:

"'Snapshot's' letter upon the single-handed working of dogs at field-trials should, I think, have the consideration

of the officiary upon field-trial regulations. The object of field-trials is principally to find the best dog, and the best strains of dogs from which to select stock animals and workers. There is a great difference between some of our best strains of dogs, and it is well that there is. The dog which is nearest perfection in my eyes would not suit some sportsmen; from careless handling he would soon become boss of the job.

"We want public field-trials to point out this difference, to show us which strain of dogs mature the earliest, and are the easiest handled, which has the speed and courage to do and to dare, and, if it were possible, which has the greatest endurance. Jealousy is almost a consuming passion with some dogs, and if worked with strange dogs, in order to out-do them, will commit the worst of faults, while they are as steady as a clock when worked alone. This is almost sure to be the case with any high-strung dog, unless he is worked much in company of strange dogs, and by a careful hand.

"On the other hand, it is necessary that our dogs should be under perfect command of the breaker and of themselves under all circumstances. There are few sportsmen who do all their hunting without company who do not feel proud of having a better dog than their friends, and to prove it they must be hunted together.

"At the age puppies are brought out few have had sufficient experience to be perfectly reliable. It is easy to see that the single-handed plan best displays the *natural* qualifications, and it is my opinion that for the puppy stakes (which are principally for breeders) it would better accomplish the object. For all other stakes I am in favour of working together by lots. Like children, some dogs are more capable of being thoroughly educated than

others, and this is the better plan for an examination. Any of us who may have puppies upon which we can depend will have every chance to show all there is in them by running in other than the puppy stakes.

"M. VON CULIN."

CHAPTER XXII.

VERMIN *versus* GAME.

ALL sorts of attacks—and, truth compels me to say, very senseless ones sometimes—are made by city writers and non-sporting men who know nothing whatever of the subjects they are broaching, against sportsmen and farmers who are practically acquainted with everything pertaining to their pursuits. Thus a wholesale raid is now made by *soi-disant* naturalists and self-styled men of science against sportsmen, on account of their destroying vermin of every description whenever they are able to do so. One of these enthusiastic vermin protectors mournfully writes that:

"Notwithstanding all the assertions to the contrary" (made by naturalists), "farmers, sportsmen, and keepers will consider all birds of prey as unnecessary, and, in fact, hurtful to the breeding of game, poultry, and pigeons, and, as a consequence, we need hardly say that the aforesaid birds of prey meet always with a more than warm reception at the hands of these ignorant men."

Some writers actually tell us that birds of prey are positively beneficial wherever game is to be preserved. If so, I should advise some believers in that peculiar creed to try the following experiment—viz. to preserve strictly all birds of prey and vermin (for note that vermin, too, are stated to

be highly beneficial to preserving), and if these animals should perchance not be numerous enough already on the land, nothing would be easier than to import birds from some other benighted country, where their riddance would be considered as a boon, and I warrant that when once the new comers shall have been fully impressed with the fact that in their new abode they will meet with no molestation whatever—on the contrary, that all sorts of care will be duly taken to insure their comfort and welfare—and when they find on experiment that the best of everything will be placed at their disposal—I am sure, I repeat, that they will never willingly part from such a "happy land;" and therefore the trial will proceed under every condition of success. Well, then, this being settled, and the rapacious birds and animals being duly installed and fully acclimatised, let the owner of the land try to organise his game-preserving on whatever scale he chooses. Does he for a moment think that his endeavours in this latter part of his programme will possibly meet with success? A hawk that can possibly feed on young pheasants, young partridges, or young rabbits, will never watch for a rat or a mole to come out of his hiding-place. This stands to reason. And the birds themselves know it so well that farm-pigeons fly home at once whenever in their flights they chance to catch a glimpse of a hawk coming towards them. That a hawk, being hard pressed, occasionally pounces on a rat or a mole, and devours it, is likely enough, but that from this the sweeping conclusion should be drawn that hawks live exclusively on rats and other vermin is absurd; it would, indeed, be too good to be true. It is an acknowledged fact that a weasel was seen *once* killing a hawk; but was the attack made directly by the animals on one another, or did the fight arise simply from a contention? Might not, for

instance, the weasel have been just proceeding to eat the prey it had just caught when the hawk swooped down upon it, not for the actual wish of killing and eating the weasel, but merely for the sake of stealing the rabbit from it; and, then might not the weasel, in self-assertion of its right of property, have defended its prey against the new comer, and hence the fight, and the death of the hawk as its consequence. Every experienced sportsman must have witnessed such things, or things very similar. What makes me think that my explanation is the most natural that can be adduced to explain the fact is, that once I witnessed a case bearing in a certain degree upon the question now at issue. I was coming home from shooting one day, when, passing along a row of tall trees, a partridge flew across me, and gave me a most beautiful shot. I dropped her with one barrel. Instantly, on the report of the gun, a hawk that was, unperceived by me, perched on one of the trees, swooped down, and actually carried away the bird as it reached the ground. Of course I immediately floored the hawk.

Now had an animal—a weasel, for instance—been killing the bird, the hawk would evidently have acted just as it did; and if a quarrel had sprung therefrom between them surely the quarrel could not have been attributed to a supposition that the hawk wanted to fight the weasel no more than it would have wished to fight me. I once saw a polecat kill a young rabbit whilst a hawk was swooping, without striking, and then fluttering over the head of the polecat, to the immense disgust and anger of the animal, who bristled and spat frightfully for some time, till the hawk, tired of its useless watching, went and perched itself on a tree hard by, when the polecat, deliberately placing itself so as to keep an eye upon the intruder's

motions, tried to carry the rabbit away, then thought better of it, and proceeded to suck it over the eye there and then. When satisfied with his meal the polecat went away, and was soon lost to my sight in some furze. Immediately the hawk was down and feeding on the rabbit's carcase. This incident is strongly in favour of my argument to prove that birds of prey do not make their food of their four-footed rivals. Perhaps, on the contrary, these animals occasionally enter into some sort of partnership for the destruction of game; for who can say but that the hawk by its fluttering may have helped the polecat to catch the rabbit, and, like many other thieves, when the sharing of the spoils was at hand, the two worthies fell out and disagreed?

There is a picture called "Disputed Possession," which some time ago was being exhibited in London, and which illustrates fully my argument. The picture represents an osprey attacking an otter in possession of a fresh-caught salmon. The *tableau* is signed "H. L. Rolfe," and this name alone is a guarantee of the truthfulness of what it purposes to represent. Now if one of our scientific antagonists had to paint such a subject he would, no doubt, merely have represented an osprey fighting with an otter as an illustration of his pet theory; but fishermen and sportsmen know full well that no osprey in its senses will deliberately attack an otter for the mere sake of antagonism. Had there been no salmon there would have been no fight, and there the whole argument remains. Therefore I think I have sufficiently demonstrated that if sportsmen and farmers destroy animals of the class described above, they are perfectly right and justified in so doing.

No doubt an otter may be a very interesting animal to an absolutely poetical lover of nature, but should this

admirer of otters become the owner of a salmon-river he will soon have the otters killed. Again, the swoops of half-a-dozen hawks hovering in the landscape no doubt enliven the view, but should the beholder be at the same time a game-preserver he will tremble for his coveys, and straightway go into a committee of ways and means for the destruction of the "swoopers."

No argument will suffice to alter the true state of things. When it comes to be a question between "Vermin and Game" it is only natural that the vermin *should* go to the wall.

CHAPTER XXIII.

REDLEGS.

I CANNOT help being amused at the somewhat startling grumbles one is apt to find in our beloved sporting papers on the subject of the rising of our game-birds. Redlegs, for instance, are almost unanimously condemned, because forsooth they have a way of trying to escape the gun which baffles tyros and riles them exceedingly. These birds are called all sorts of names ("sneaks" being about the mildest epithet that ever was applied to them), and why? Because these thoroughly wary birds won't "come and get killed." Their style is called unorthodox and their breed is forthwith condemned. Unorthodox forsooth! It is no fault of theirs. Providence is answerable for their evident want of confidence when men try to approach them. Moreover, the new system of agriculture leaving about as much stubble in the fields as there are hairs on the shell of an egg, the consequence naturally enough is that from ever so far the birds can spy you, and this joined to their native shyness makes them bolt miles away from you. Who is to blame? Certainly not the birds. Blame the want of covert; blame, if you like, Nature for having made birds that won't wait stupidly, even when they see you, till you spring them; but above all blame yourselves for not possessing the

talent of making the birds lie well and eventually securing them.

This last part of the programme is a slow and tedious process, hence its want of followers. We are too fond of making quickly an overflowing bag nowadays, because it flatters our vanity very much indeed; but a thorough sportsman ought to have no vanity of that kind. A true sportsman wants no praise from anyone. If he has done his duty to the game he has bagged he is satisfied, however few in number may be the heads of game he brings home.

There is no mistake about it. A well-acquired bird is worth a thousand birds shot in cold blood—at least that is my feeling, and I contend that the man who has shot half-a-dozen redlegs fairly in the field has done far more in point of sportsmanship than the shooter who cleverly knocks over five hundred out of five thousand birds driven over and around him, because the latter is merely a more or less skilful shooter, whereas the former must not only be at least equal to him in point of skill, but he must know (and that is the essential part) how to outwit the birds, and he must have the patience necessary for putting this knowledge into execution.

For me there is far more fun in hunting up my game than in the actual killing of it. This last part of the business, through sheer habit and long practice, I perform without being aware when it is done that I have done it. I do not hear my gun go off. The birds rise. Bang, bang! I am all attention forward; but I am not aware that I have fired. All has been done mechanically. My finger, my hands, and my eyes, together with a certain mechanical mental calculation as to where to fire, have done it all; but I was not with the gun at all, my mind was with the birds. Therefore the actual shooting of the birds has given me

but little satisfaction, since the act of firing was performed unconsciously. The same may be said of shooting at drives and *battues*. The shooters get into the knack of killing, and when once they have acquired that knack, what fun can there be in killing bird after bird with an almost dead certainty?

Of course at first the tyro misses and misses again, and he accordingly enjoys the drive as first-rate practice for him; but a good shot cares little for the fun after he has spent a couple of hours behind the mantlet. I know I was tired of it very soon; and I daresay many shooters who now praise driving and laud it up to the skies, do so merely because it is *fashionable* to be enthusiastic on the subject, but at heart they do not and cannot think much of it. I think it is but fit for keepers, merely for the sake of providing game for the markets, for there is to my mind no sportsmanship in it at all.

Much has been said of the talent evinced by those who *direct* the drives. According to my humble opinion very little praise does it deserve, seeing that it is found out merely by repeatedly driving the birds and noting where they will pass when they are driven. No great genius is required, I should think, to make *that* out, and generalship (as it is called by the drivers) of that kind is of too tame a nature to deserve any laudatory encomium. No, there is no sport exhibited in drives. These are merely resorted to in order to make monstrous bags, nothing more or less, whatever may be the motives—*i.e.* the vanity of the thing, the fun of the row, or the necessity of killing game by that means in one day—when the shooters have not the patience or the time of killing it leisurely day by day, as it might be got at in the usual course of things. This latter, however, to our modern shooters, even when they have ample leisure

time, entails too much trouble. That's where *le bat les blesse.*

Too much trouble! "Bedad!" as the Irishmen say, but that's where the fun is, in my humble opinion. Redlegs are wary? Be cunning. They are swift? Be skilful. They choose rum places to lie in? Be patient, be indefatigable, and you will overreach them at last, and well repaid shall you be for your trouble.

"Our fields are so bare," exclaims one. If so, you will have a little more trouble than you would otherwise have had if your fields had had plenty of stubble; but still you will succeed, for surely on your ground there is some short covert of some kind or another—furze, for instance. Well, why don't you systematically push your birds into it, and then walk up to them like a man?

I have shot redlegs in their own country, and they are got at without having them driven in shoals over your head.

And as for sport, why there is no bird that gives more sport in the full acceptation of the term than redlegs. Your gray partridges are too tame for me; they rise too close; they are got at too easily. But redlegs—ah, there is fun with them. You never know where they are; they may rise out of range; they may be at your feet. Grays, when in coveys, bolt altogether with a vengeance. Reds sometimes do so too, but oftener they may be sprung one by one or in couples. I have repeatedly bagged five and six birds out of the same covey within a minute or two; and that's what I call sport.

Of course we had to push the coveys, and to trudge along a good bit; but then, when finally this glorious set-to at the broken covey took place, who cared for the trouble we had had in breaking it? There are the birds. Now for skill, for coolness. Up! whirrzr! Bang! That's one

down. Another rises behind our back. We wheel round and grass it in style. One of the dogs is still on point, and the other winding. We reload and go up to Don. We can see the bird two yards from the dog's nose. It rises, and is bundled over before it knows what on earth is the matter with the elements. Then we go up to Ponto, who is transfixed in a furze-field. Now there will be fun. Let us divide the ground, and let us beat towards one another; for redlegs, when they have made up their minds to crawl, will lick landrails into fits in the crawling and sly-running business. You see I was right. One of the birds rose at your feet, fully a hundred yards away from the place where the covey had originally entered the furze. Now we must beat this field carefully, for the birds have been headed; they must be here and they must be found. Accordingly they are duly found, all of them, beyond one or two who have got away unperceived; but even these are not lost for ever, we will find them some other day.

Now, is not this sport? Then why say that redlegs are a calamity? They are difficult birds to reach and to kill, but the greater these difficulties the more sportsman-like and praiseworthy is the sport, and the greater therefore is the cause for congratulation when the birds are bagged.

As far as I am concerned I have enjoyed redleg-shooting in the open more than any other shooting I am acquainted with. On the other hand, I tried what fun there might be at driving them, and I have found it to be too much—*toujours perdrix.* It is a regular sickener when once you are up to the mark. Besides, when out shooting I cannot bear standing still for any length of time; it riles me (to use an Americanism). I must be on the move, and I daresay many of my brother sportsmen are in the same predicament.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PRACTICAL HINTS ON SHOOTING.

THERE is no pursuit in which preliminaries and accessories play so prominent a part, and on the successful issue of which they have such an all-powerful influence, as in the sport of shooting. It is astonishing how one single thing, and perhaps abstractedly a very insignificant thing in appearance too, will seriously interfere with a day's sport. Everybody knows that a damp day will affect the *driving* power of the powder and augment its smoke in no inconsiderable degree; whereas a warm and dry day will make the gun *ring* between your fingers at every shot you fire. But these effects, being brought about by a change of temperature over which we have no control, must be put up with. There are, however, many other things which it lies in our power to organise on a comparatively sure and regular footing, and to these every shooter's attention has, perforce, been drawn at some one time or another.

Accoutrements, of course, come first in the list to be considered. Of boots there are innumerable varieties; from the porpoise-skin lace-up to the old india-rubber top-boot. The latter was invariably announced as thoroughly ventilated, though how this could be done was to me a puzzle. As a rule, I eschew waterproof contrivances for the feet; they

are dangerous and uncomfortable to the man who walks in them. I daresay they answer well enough for anglers who like to paddle in the shallows and then remain stationary when once they have hit on a suitable spot; but, to the marsh-shooter, they are a snare and a nuisance. This has been for some years proclaimed by almost every public sporting writer; but there are still shooters, especially beginners, who think that it must be very unpleasant to have wet feet, and therefore, *per contra*, that it must be very comfortable to be warm and dry all day through, even when floundering after snipe in a swampy bog. Of course, it is nice enough to have one's feet dry and cosy, but a sportsman worthy, or anxious of becoming worthy of the name, must be ready to put up with a great deal in the way of discomforts. The sport to him is all and everything, and the *fièvre d'action* keeps harm away from him. This is no fallacy. It is self-evident that the man who, for instance, watches for ducks night after night in all sorts of weathers, must have something more than a human constitution to resist it; he has what our Gallic neighbours so graphically denominate *le feu sacré*, and *that* nerves him for every emergency, and sustains a strength that would indubitably give way without such an all-powerful ally. It must be clear to every sensible man who will give the case a thought that any individual thus exposed without a strong incentive would eventually succumb, however strong his constitution might naturally have been. I have sometimes myself wondered how I could ever have stood such storms as I have had occasionally to weather. Had I had no gun in hand, do you think that I should have remained out for a moment more than I could have helped in such inclement weather?—not I.

When out merely for a walk, how careful we are to beat

a hasty retreat home at the least sign of an approaching downpour; but if we chance to be at the time on sport intent, what would stop us? Nothing short of a cataclysm. *La fièvre de la chasse* has put us all, morally and physically, in a glow, and we care not an atom for the elements so long as we can shoot. Rain never puts me out. Now when it rains, then indeed waterproof boots are a nuisance, for somehow rain is sure to find its way in—over the top, if it cannot manage to get in at the seams.

And again, when marsh-shooting, one either steps in a treacherous hole, full of water, and thereupon fills one's boots up to the brim, or else one succeeds in effecting the same object by jumping into a ditch; and then—oh, then! —the boots prove themselves to be but too thoroughly water-tight. Do what you will, take whatever position you may, the inside cargo declines being removed or dislodged, and you must perforce take a thorough footbath whilst perambulating the meadows. Now I know nothing more uncomfortable than such a state of things. That such incidents as I have described will repeatedly happen, every marsh-shooter of experience will testify; therefore what need is there of waterproof contrivances? He who is really anxious to bag the birds will not mind getting his feet wet when it is a *sine quâ non* of the sport; and if he has taken the precaution of providing a dry pair of stockings or socks, and puts them on after the sport is over, he will feel none the worse for his occasional duckings. So much, then, for waterproof boots.

As for waterproof coats, they present a different case altogether. They, unlike boots, may be made ventilated, and when so manufactured they are a positive comfort in a storm. The usual waterproof coats, however, have one notable defect, and that is that the guns' heel plates are apt

to slide down, more or less, when the gun is fired. This is easily understood. The wet india-rubber is slippery; the heel-plates, being themselves, as a rule, highly polished and wet too, have no hold on the wet material; hence the unsatisfactory deflection in the aim of the gun. By-the-way, heel-plates are, by all means, practically useless in this epoch of breechloaders; wherefore, then, will the gun-makers of the period persist in manufacturing them with these useless metallic appendages? I have my wild-fowl-guns' heel-plates removed, and in their stead I get the wood where they formerly rested engraved and quadrilated rather sharply, in such a way as to give the guns a sufficient grasp on any cloth or material against which it may happen to be pressed when taking aim. There is, again, another glaring defect in wild-fowling guns and ordinary guns used for winter sport, and that is the extreme length of stock. How can a man shoot as well with the same weapon in August, when it is broiling hot, and the sportsman is consequently but lightly clad, and in hard winter-time, when every coat and great-coat he can put on is put in requisition? It stands to reason that the length of stock which fitted so well in August must be of too extreme a length in winter, when it has all the thickness of the winter clothing to back up the gun's heel-plate, thereby thrusting the gun too much forward. To remedy this, I get my winter guns shorter in the stock by at least half an inch than the length of stock that suits me in light shooting costume. By this means, in the hardest weather, and therefore with the thickest of clothing, I am enabled to bring up the gun to shoulder as instantaneously as usual; and I can fire with ease and comfort, and as quickly as if partridge-shooting in the prime of the season.

To those sportsmen who have but one gun I would give the following hint, which I have put in practice with a

favourite gun of mine, and that is to get a good expert stock-maker to saw off a slice of their gun-stock, half an inch or more in thickness, according to the way in which they intend to clothe themselves during the hard season. This slice to be preserved and prepared so as to be fitted on the stock by means of two easily-worked screws. Thus the slice may be easily taken off and put on at will, as occasion requires. In this way, when I wish to use that old gun of mine, I may shoot with it in all seasons.

When I first had the gun I found it such a first-class killing weapon that I made it my constant companion.

Now, up to December it behaved nobly, I may say. Just then, however, a terrible frost set in, and we had to cover ourselves well, when I found that whenever a shot presented itself I experienced an awkwardness in fitting the gun to aim that spoilt my shooting altogether. I am a snap-shooter, *i.e.* the moment anything is in sight, the gun is aimed and fired almost instantaneously. If therefore there be any difficulty, however slight, in having the gun brought to bear on the game the moment it is in sight, of course I am out altogether.

Well, miss after miss was the order of the day, and I got *riled*, you know, as only a sportsman can get riled when he does not bag in fair proportion to all that he has had a chance of bagging.

I was raving. Bear in mind I had not as yet made out *where* the hitch was. I felt awkward, but did not know what made me feel so. However, I was struck all of a sudden with the manner in which I had to stretch my arms when taking aim, and then the problem was solved. I straightway gave up shooting for the day. I went home, and from thence to the gunsmith, whom I ordered to make the alteration I have mentioned. Of course the worthy

man objected, just like a fashionable tailor who will *not* make your clothes as *you* wish them to be made, but who will insist upon clothing you like a picture in the fashionable Parisian *Journal des Modes*. So my worthy old gunsmith objected, as indeed I had fully expected he would.

"It will spoil the gun altogether," he said.

"How?" I asked him.

"Why? it won't look half so well."

"As far as that goes, what's the odds?" I retorted. "I don't want the gun for show, I want it for use, and provided it suits me and kills well, never mind how it looks."

"Ah well! if such be the case, of course I have nothing more to say."

Accordingly the alteration was done, and to my unbounded satisfaction I found that my idea had been a good one, and that the plan answered marvellously. Therefore, brother sportsmen, doctor your guns if they require it as I doctored mine, and I will answer for it that it will be a complete and (as the theatrical advertisements say) a legitimate success.

The next thing in importance to having a gun properly fitted to the sportsman for all seasons is his getting proper and good cartridges. Some shooters buy their cartridges ready made; but with all due deference to each and every individual gunmaker who sells them, as a rule such cartridges cannot be depended upon. Putting aside the question of wilful and systematic robbery, which we will not entertain, though it is carried on pretty widely, there are in the manufacture of the cartridges so many hands employed, and the said hands' interest being not in the quality and make of each individual cartridge, but in the quantity they can anyhow turn out made, it follows naturally that most of these cartridges must be in some way defective. Indeed,

almost from any shop but a first-class one where cartridges are manufactured, a large percentage will be found either badly filled—*i.e.* with an insufficient quantity of powder and too much shot—or *vice versâ*, or, what is still worse, very little powder and very little shot; the cartridges being mainly filled up with thick wads (this is a fact), or else with the powder-wads put carelessly slanting, so that the powder stands much in the shape of a whistle's mouth-piece or else with the turning-down badly performed. Then mistakes will arise: shot No. 5 may be in reality in cartridges bearing No. 10 stamped on their shot-wads, and *vice versâ*. This question of cartridges is always a vexing one, and when one has been repeatedly missing in the field, and finally determines upon opening with a penknife the remainder of his cartridges, and then finds them for the most part thus unsatisfactorily made, it is not calculated to improve his peace of mind by any means. It is most annoying, to say the least of it. And, moreover, it is in every respect like a complaint against Government—there is no redress for it. If you argue the subject with your gunmaker, he shuffles it off upon his clerks, or his boys, or his apprentices, or his work-girls, or anyone else he may think of. Nobody has done it. It is nobody's fault. It is a regular red-tape-system, and to put it fairly and honestly it is a snare and a swindle, nothing more or less. Therefore if you can possibly help it, avoid being the victim of such unworthy trickery: make your cartridges yourself, or see them made at home by your man under your own supervision. Then you may be sure that the full quantities of powder and shot respectively will be placed in the cases, as the man has no interest in reducing the quantities, and it is a great comfort to a shooter to know that *what he is going to fire ought to kill.* I know *that*, right well. And in shooting, as indeed

in everything else, confidence is everything. If you doubt the quality of your killing stock-in-trade, you don't shoot half as well as you would if you knew all was right, tight, and above-board. Cæsar's wife must be above suspicion, and so ought to be a sportsman's gun and ammunition.

Now about guns.

A bad workman has always bad tools, and, *vice versâ*, a good one is always blessed somehow with excellent instruments. And so it is in shooting matters. It is all downright nonsense to say that any particular guns cannot be made to kill. As far as I am concerned, somehow I always manage to make them kill, and as I do not flatter myself that I am a genius or anything of that sort, I conclude therefore that others may do the same. The fact of the matter is, *every gun has its individuality*. Now, non-practical men will stare at this, but it is nevertheless a fact. Practical shooters, as a rule, do not indulge in theoretical fancies, and what they are brought to acknowledge as an undeniable fact cannot be denied by any theorists. I do not mean to imply that guns have souls (though dogs may have), but I mean that each gun has a certain standard for its loading, which must be accurately determined, and when once found out must be strictly adhered to by the man who uses that gun. That is in fact, I believe, one of the best and most valid reasons why ready-made cartridges turned out in shoals cannot and do not prove as satisfactory as those made individually for each gun. From this I must not be understood to imply that ready-made cartridges never do kill. They do, more or less (the latter, however, is the rule), *i.e.* they do not kill either so neatly, so cleanly, or so far, as the specially-made cartridges. At least that is my experience, and beyond that I cannot speak.

Now I always make my cartridges myself, and I make

them of two sorts, the first to give *the widest possible spread* for snap-shooting and short ranges, the others to *shoot tight and carry a good distance.* There are, however, for the reason above mentioned, distinct rules to be guided by in this loading business. Every shooter who *knows* his gun has his cartridges made, or makes them accordingly. Some guns take more powder than others, others require more or less shot; in fact, there is no knowing what doses a gun requires until you have handled it a little while.

CHAPTER XXV.

PRACTICAL HINTS ON SHOOTING—*Continued.*

AND now I come to the vexed question about dogs—ranging dogs and retrieving dogs, proper or otherwise.

We have heard a good deal of praise sung in favour of the retrievers proper, but unfortunately this praise was mostly sung by those directly and pecuniarily interested in the introduction, breeding, and training of these dogs.

The outside public, however, always easily led when a few good names head the list of fashion (or fancy), adopted the new breed cheerfully, and paid down their guineas with avidity, in the expectation that they were going to behold extra-wonderful performances.

They have now repented, and retrievers proper, I am thankful to say, are going out of fashion, at least as far as working in the field is concerned; and that is a step in the right direction. Of two things, one must be admitted—viz. game, when shot, is either to be picked up by the keeper or the shooter himself, or else it must be brought to hand by a dog. I acknowledge that I prefer the latter course, even though the dead game may stare me in the face. But why have special dogs to do *that?* And if we must have special dogs for the retrieving business, why have that enormous, shaggy, shapeless, breedless, foreign animal

imported and trained for that purpose only? Have our setters so inferior a power of scent that they are to be crossed with Newfoundlands in order to produce *the* fancy retrievers? Or do we cross our setters with the foreign animals in order to give the latter what they lack—*i.e.* sporting blood? If so, why not spare ourselves all that trouble, and stick to our setters and make them retrieve?

Personally I have, as yet, never seen a really good and young retriever proper that could be trusted to do his duty, neither more nor less, without a lot of hard words and ill-blood, and the only place where I have seen retrievers proper behaving and performing passably well was at the seaside when sea-fowl shooting. For this reason, I suppose, that as they had merely to go *where they saw* the bird (when shot) they did not go slowly blundering about, as most of these dogs do when field-shooting if the slightest cover intervenes between their game and their sight. Why retrievers proper are used at all, in fact, for any kind of shooting, I am at a loss to understand. We always have had in the British Kingdom excellently-nosed dogs, quite as powerful as retrievers, though not so heavy; for example, our field and water spaniels, our setters, &c. Now it is well known that spaniels or setters are very easily trained to retrieve; they, moreover, are generally endowed with a naturally tender mouth (and that is more than most retrievers can boast of), they are far quicker in their search, more ardent, more cunning, more full of bustle, more under control. Then why, in the name of all that is wonderful, have we allowed ourselves to be saddled with the imported and comparatively useless and lumbering retrievers proper?

Our forefathers never saw a retriever proper; their field-dogs retrieved, and they hardly ever lost a head of game. Nowadays all our field-dogs are broken to lie

down and to remain still just when their services are most required—*i.e.* when you want your wounded game brought to hand; and that blundering, sooty nuisance, the retriever proper, is let go, and scampers about often with an iron bit in his mouth (!) whilst everyone stares at him in admiration (what for ?), as though it were a marvellous thing that a big dog like him could make such a mess of the affair as he generally does. I have no patience with such nonsense. If our keepers and breakers would devote to a spaniel, a setter, or a pointer, *one-fourth of the time and patience* they bestow on their black Newfoundlanders, they would make of them perfect wonders. And, mind you, it is very encouraging to a breaker to see his pupils improving at every lesson, so to speak, whereas nothing is more disheartening than the slow work of teaching a retriever proper. The fact is, retrievers proper are not, have never been, and never will be, strictly speaking, sporting dogs. They were not intended by nature to be so. We have taught them to retrieve (well, badly, or indifferently), and we forthwith have made them retrieve game; but their retrieving ought to be confined to picking up and collecting firewood—they would take to it far more kindly. The fact is, the whole affair must be traced to "fancy." Sport has had nothing to do with it. For instance, now, the *furore* in England is about colleys. We hear nothing now but colleys, colleys, and colleys. Well, I would not mind taking a moderate bet that within five years some new notion will be started, and that colleys will supersede entirely the retrievers of to-day both in the field and out of it. They will be taught to retrieve (for they learn well and quickly, and they have also a better power of scent than the black dogs), they will be taken out shooting, and then *they* will be the retrievers proper! What folly all this is. If we had no

proper sporting dogs—dogs whose nature, whose instinct, whose very life have for their object the pursuit of game—I should understand our resorting to any other kind of available dogs, but we have, thank goodness, plenty of spaniels and plenty of setters, &c.; then why not use them, and *teach them to do* all they can and will do, especially when they are so easily taught? Why this is not done is to me a mystery. We are, as a rule, very fond of jeering at our French neighbours, but I think they may fairly score there, for *they* would not be such simpletons as to have their ranging dogs taught to drop, and allow their wounded game to escape and their dead game to be lost. Neither would they saddle themselves with a retriever proper (!) who could not be trusted alone, but must needs have a man to work him exclusively and keep him under control! The whole affair is absurd; but then it is fashionable! *Cela excuse tout.*

Well, as I said before this digression, sea-fowl shooting is about the only sport where retrievers proper are not worse than a nuisance (provided they are excellently well trained, of course). In fact, they seem fitted for that sport well enough. Their thick hide protects them from the cold and the storms, and if really plucky they will face the waves readily enough, and their big frames serve them well in the tussle that ensues. I have, however, in the course of my shooting expeditions, met with only *one* retriever proper that would go anywhere and anyhow, under any circumstances, and do his work fairly—even by the seaside. All the others were soft-hearted; and when, after a spiritless and futile attempt, they were flung back ashore, they would come to heel very tamely, and let the bird (or birds) take his (or their) chance. I don't call *that* retrieving.

The best retrieving dog I ever had was a setter bitch.

The next best was a pointer dog. At this, some will stare, but it is a fact nevertheless. That pointer dog of mine would face any thicket when covert-shooting, and would not care a straw for a storm when out river or sea shooting. If he saw something come down, that something was bound to come into the bag. In fact, he occasionally overdid the business; and several times he had narrow escapes from drowning, through searching so hard after wounded ducks, or the like, who were attempting to escape him.

I readily admit that it seems unusual for a pointer to take so kindly to water, and so forth; but at the same time I must say that all the pointers I have had have taken to water readily enough. The fact is, show plenty of game to a sporting dog, and he won't care a fig for anything, provided he please you; *for, in so doing, he pleases himself.* Your passion for sport is the very essence of his own nature, and neither water nor brambles will stop his courage, his high mettle, and his natural inclination. Why are pointers generally so shy of pricking or wetting themselves? Simply because they are neither taken to coverts nor to river or sea-shooting. But if you wish your dogs to become good all round, take them with you when young everywhere; shoot over them loads of game (the more the merrier), and these dogs will go through fire and water, if necessary, in the pursuit of their avocation. And that is how things ought to be. One dog ought to be sufficient for any single sportsman, but that dog must be a good jack-of-all-trades. I am speaking here of the sportsman who has no pretensions to extra gentility, &c.; one who likes, when the fit takes him, to whistle his dog and wander away with his gun a little everywhere. Those who, favoured by fortune, can boast of their kennels, can well afford to follow the dictates of fashion, and they may act

accordingly; but for one of these rich shooters there are hundreds, nay thousands, of poorer men, who, though not able to keep two ranging dogs—a retriever proper *and a man to work the retriever*—still have their hearts in the right place, and are not less enthusiastic in matters of sport than their richer *confrères*. It is for these that I am here speaking.

And, by-the-way, let me here give them a hint. If you have a young dog—pointer, setter, or spaniel—that you would like to teach to retrieve, don't go wasting your time and your patience in teaching him to retrieve balls of worsted, rabbit-skins, and the like; for when you have taught him to do so, he will, most likely, decline mouthing any bird or animal, dead or wounded, but still warm, that you may have shot; and that is very disheartening. I will tell you how I proceed. I go to the seaside in summer weather with my pupil or pupils, and take them out regularly, every day, on the shore. There I knock over everything that passes me; this has, first, the desirable effect of making the young dogs accustomed to the gun, and gives them a taste for it, too; and secondly, they will, one and all, soon or late, take to retrieving the birds, in or out of the water. If one is at first rather shy, the example of the others soon encourages him to follow and imitate them. Besides, occasionally, a bird falls close to the shore, in shallow water; and if no bird should chance to fall so conveniently, you can always make one do so, or pretend that one does so, by merely firing off a barrel, and at the same time throwing one of the birds you have already bagged just where you wish it to have fallen. Well, the fact of the bird being so close to the dog will induce the latter to go up to it and lay hold of it. This is a great step. Repeat the trick again, but throw your bird farther

away still, and so forth, until the dog does not mind where it falls, and goes readily anywhere to take it. When once a dog goes well to sea, he will go anywhere. Of course you must at first choose a sandy shore, sloping easily and gradually, so as not to get your young dog suddenly immersed in a deep hole, which might bring about the undesirable result of making him water-shy afterwards. Choose, also, a very warm day, so that the dog has, in fact, every inducement to face the water, and to like being in it.

I advocate the sea-shore for this training for several reasons, among which I will mention the fact that there are always plenty of birds to be got there; then the birds, being tough, are therefore not easily *broken*, the dogs do not get a taste of their blood, and do not acquire the consequent habit of tearing them to pieces as they would tenderer birds. Moreover, on the sea-shore, one has plenty of elbow-room, and the ground being open, the dog's motions are always easily controlled; finally, there are no hares or rabbits likely to jump up and induce your pupils to have "a lark" with them; so that, altogether, one cannot possibly choose a better place whereon to train one's dogs, at least as far as retrieving is concerned. When once they are perfect there, they may be then safely practised in the field, and on regular game.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PRACTICAL HINTS ON SHOOTING—*Continued.*

IN shooting, as in everything else, practice alone makes a man perfect, or at least as nearly perfect as a man can hope to be. All the reading and all the advice in the world will not make a man kill, with anything like tolerable certainty, if he does not practise much with the gun. True there are some men to whom shooting comes naturally—that is to say, these men, with very little practice, reach as high a standard of perfection as those who, less gifted, have had to plod on for some considerable time; but still, even these gifted individuals must have some not inconsiderable handling of their guns before they can rank themselves as good shots. Therefore the intending sportsman, whether he be naturally clever or not, cannot have too much shooting in either case, and I should advise beginners to practice at everything, flying or running, that passes them. That will make them as good as can be on legitimate game, when they will be brought to cope with it in earnest. The best small birds on which boys or youths should try their hands are larks, and the best way of carrying on the programme is not to get the larks caught, and then let them go one after the other to be fired at, with more or less luck; but I would have the youthful shooters plod on in the stubbles

and shoot the larks as they flush them—either as soon as the birds get on the wing, in the snap-shooting style, or when the birds are fairly settled in their flight. Anyone who will try this style of practice will, I am convinced, testify that the birds afford every position and style of flight of ordinary game-birds. The lark rises occasionally like a snipe, and flies, when settled in her course, either like a quail, like a partridge, or like a pheasant. True, her small size does not serve the marksman well; but on the other hand the birds are very tender—a pellet, and not a large one either, brings them down; so that, taken all in all, by loading with small shot, the chances of killing are just as great as if the gun were brought to bear on regular game when loaded with bigger shot.

Larks are, I think, the only birds that offer such a great similarity of flight to that of game-birds; and as larks are, as a rule, tolerably abundant almost everywhere, the beginner can always find plenty of them to try his hand on.

I advocate the plan of making the youngsters beat the fields themselves for several reasons, one of which is that it makes the boys fag a little, it forms their constitutions, and hardens their frames; the second reason is, that walking up to the birds and flushing them is the only way of bringing about the different modes of flight adopted by each bird as it rises. For instance, one will squat until you are within five or six yards from her; all the while she has got her eyes on you, and the moment she thinks you are getting rather too close up she starts towards the east, then the west, then a dash to the north, finally she settles for the south. That is the flighty snipe style. Another one, on the contrary, rises a yard or so above the ground, then flies off in front of you, almost in a straight line, parallel to the ground. That is the quail's or the gray partridge's style.

Finally, another lark, when flushed, will rise, rise, rise, as well as get away at the same time, just like a red-legged partridge surprised in a furze-field. In fact, then, every mode of flight that a sportsman may have to deal with in the course of his career, larks will offer him on a diminutive scale. I was trained myself on larks, and have often been astonished at the variety of shots that a score of larks would offer me within an hour or so. When a youth fairly floors fifteen larks out of twenty that he has flushed himself, he may be taken on game; and when he has become accustomed to the whirr of the partridges, and to the startling cackle of the pheasant, I undertake to say he will render a fair account of any of those birds that will rise within fair range of his gun.

Shooting, however, whether carried on against small birds or against *bonâ fide* game birds or animals, requires, like everything else, a little brains and common sense. It does not do to blaze away blindly, anyhow or anywhere; nothing is more detrimental to ultimate progress in that branch of sport than reckless firing. What is the good, for instance, of firing off your gun if you know yourself that the distance that separates you from your quarry be too great. It is an absurd waste of ammunition, to begin with; but the worst of it is that it accustoms the shooter to fire indiscriminately, and that ought to be discountenanced. A shooter's first qualification is to be cool and collected. Now when a man fires at a fresh bird some eighty yards off, he proves *de facto* that he is neither cool nor collected for the time being, since he fires at a bird which none but a madman or a fool would think of firing at. (I said a "fresh" bird, purposely, for when a bird has been fired at already, and there is evidence or likelihood that it has been hit, then, whether far or near, provided

there be a chance, however remote, of hitting it, it is the duty of the sportsman to fire at it, so as to prevent, if possible, a cripple from straying away and being lost.)

A good deal has been said about the habit which certain shooters have of shutting their left eyes when taking aim. Now there are certain circumstances under which this style of aiming cannot be detrimental to the accuracy of aim; but I contend that it is not necessary at any time. When, for instance, a bird or a hare flies or runs straight away from you, I daresay one may shut one's left eye, and aim away like an artilleryman previous to letting fly; but all that could have been dispensed with; and that is the only case where the one-eye-shut style can be put in practice. In every other circumstance it is detrimental to the accuracy of the aim. How, for instance, when a snipe is zigzagging alternately towards all points of the compass almost simultaneously—how, I repeat, can a man follow the bird's flight if he has shut one eye? It is impossible. For, the question at issue is, *not to send your shot where the snipe is* whilst you aim, but *to send it where the snipe will be* when your shot can reach it at its distance. And how could a man *guess*, so to speak, the particular spot where the snipe will be then if he does not keep his eyes wide open and uses his brains as well? As far as I am concerned, I keep, under all circumstances, both my eyes open; and upon my conscience, had I four eyes, *I would not think of shutting one when all are so much needed*; and why some people advocate doing so I am at a loss to understand. No; in the field one cannot bring too many sound gifts to help one along, and to shut wilfully one eye when competing with the vagaries of game-birds and game-quadrupeds when they are trying to evade you, is, to say the least, a most senseless proceeding; in fact, I do not

believe that it is, in reality, practised by any really good shots, though they may think themselves that they do so. I have watched narrowly several partisans of that system, and I have seen them, certainly, closing *somewhat* the eyelid of their left eye, but *they never closed it altogether*; and that is just what I thought was the case, for I believe that this partial instinctive closing of the eye has for its object to concentrate more powerfully on the retina of the eye the bird's or the animal's motions. Indeed, when we stand at any great distance from some persons or some objects which we cannot well recognise or make out, do we not, naturally and unconsciously, close partially our eyes in order to make out more quickly the nature or identity of the objects or persons who have caught our sight? Well, that is just what a man does when he partially closes his left eye in aiming at anything. As to closing it altogether, it is not likely that anyone should do so, and those who say they do, think so perhaps, but in reality they do not, though they are not aware of that fact.

I come now to the subject of carrying game, always an awkward question in shooting affairs. A sportsman who is really on business intent cannot possibly do without an attendant, even if he shoot but little game; for this reason, that the carrying of a gun *on the ready* all day long is enough to tax the stamina of any man, without having the further annoyance of a load on one's back, which load increases at every shot, and fairly weighs you down. I know what it is, for many times on the Continent I have been unable to find a man or a youth willing to follow me all day in my perambulations, and with sufficient strength and courage to carry my game-bag without giving in when half the day was hardly over; and consequently I have had to do the drudgery myself more than once. It is not

pleasant; yet you would rather do as I did than go without sport, would you not? Still, all the same, it takes something out of a man, I can assure you, to trudge along under a broiling sun for hours and hours with a couple of hares and a few birds on his back. In this case, however, there are hints which may not be unacceptable; for there are two ways of carrying heads of game. The first way is to carry them altogether in the bag, and that is terribly awkward; for, if anything heavy is in it, the bag fairly draws down your shoulder and makes it ache. The second way is more rational, and at any rate it is, I know from experience, less tiring, for I have had to put it in practice many a time, and I am therefore competent to speak about it. I only carry birds in my bag. Rabbits or hares I hang to my belt, with sundry swivel-hooks fixed on the said belt at regular intervals. You will find that if you insert the point of the hook between the tendons of the legs, the hares will hang comfortably there against your thighs, and never bother you. I hook them through both their fore and hind legs, so as not to allow them to dangle about, as they tire you much then. As for rabbits (as they are neither so long nor so heavy as hares are), when hung by their hind legs they do well enough. Now, anyone who may have had a few shots at either hares or rabbits, and no one to carry them for him, will find that this mode of carrying is extremely handy. I need not say that the belt must be rather stout and wide, with a powerful buckle, and that the swivel-hooks must be either secured strongly to it, in settled places, or else be movable at will along the length of the belt. The first case, however, is the best, as you will find that a heavy hare, hung fore and aft to two different swivels, if the latter are movable, soon draws them together by its weight; and the dangling body of the hare, then, is irksome,

as you are obliged continually to push it back in its place; and besides, it makes the hare appear to you far heavier than it in reality is. A belt properly prepared allows you to carry three hares and as many rabbits comfortably, besides having any number of birds in your bag or in your pockets.

Some men hang their birds outside their bags; they say that it keeps them fresher. Perhaps it does, but there are many things to be said against the system. First of all, supposing some of the birds have been shot badly in the neck, eventually the strings will cut their heads off, the birds will drop on the ground and be lost. Then again, if your birds are hung outside your bag, you must confine yourself to walk in open ground. Should you go through hedges the chances are that most of your birds would get torn off by the branches, or otherwise spoiled. Again, when it rains, the birds get in a sad condition for the table; or if the weather be very hot, you are followed about wherever you go by a lot of nasty flies, which settle upon your birds, and bring about their decomposition very quickly. I have tried both ways, and I think that the best plan is, when the weather is very hot, to have the birds carried in a game-basket; otherwise, in ordinary weather, the net of a capacious game-bag does well enough, especially if there be a flap ready to cover them over in case of rain or snow. In hot weather it is not a bad plan to *empty* both birds and quadrupeds previous to "hooking" or "bagging" them—that is, when they are intended for your own table. If, however, you mean to send them to a market or to a dealer, you had better let them alone, for dealers and market-buyers generally buy by actual weight, and you would be a loser by your wise precaution. So do at Rome as the Romans do, and let your game alone, to take its chance according to the fortune of war.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SHOOTING.

"GOOD and bad luk, mixt in right proporshuns, giv the best zest to life," at least so says Josh Billings, and the ancient philosopher ought to know. Well, so it is also in shooting matters. A right mixture of good and bad luck makes the most interesting day's sport; and even a blank day occasionally does give an unusual zest to the fun of the thing when next you re-enter the field on sport intent. Of course those shooters who go in for certain and sure slaughter miss that "right mixture" which constitutes the pleasure of shooting, and no one can pity them, poor fellows, if they yawn desperately between shots. It is not pleasant to be transformed into a gun-firing machine, and well may a profound *ennui* fill such shooters' hearts, after the first score of shots have been fired, and they must perforce settle into the routine of fashionable slaughter.

Comparisons, when not applied to individuals, are *not* odious, and I will, therefore, take another kind of pleasure, to wit, that of billiard-playing, and compare it to the *battue* system or drive expedient. Now supposing our billiard-players, in order to make sure of all their "shots" at billiards, should get the balls and the very tables made of metal, and get them so supereminently magnetised that

each time one of the balls should be moved it would be bound to run against another, and perhaps against the third as well, and then the two, or the whole three, would be then irresistibly attracted by and drawn into the table-pockets, would not billiard-playing be made very attractive then? It would be a "scoring game" with a vengeance, and, as such, that style would just suit those fashionable shooters who care for billiards, for then they would be sure to score as in their shooting.

Someone is laughing, I hear, and says the idea is absurd. My dear sir, when a man deliberately buys up innumerable pheasants in the, more or less, open market, and gets a fellow, or several fellows, to let them loose by the covert-side, and then gets a lot of men to drive the birds to him, so that he may make sure of having plenty to shoot at—that man, I think, has "magnetised his balls and tables," to make sure of his scoring; but if he likes to call it sport we are not bound to follow in his wake, and to admire his great pluck, talent, and skill as a sportsman. As regards his own pleasure, of course, *chacun prend son plaisir ou le trouve*; and therefore every shooter has a right to shoot his own tame ducks on his own pond if he likes and if he thinks it will afford him any satisfaction; but that will not stamp him in the eyes of his brother knights-of-the-trigger as a mighty champion of the gun; and as far as real *bonâ fide* pleasure is concerned, were the truth known, we would find much weariness of heart behind the hollow joys and empty tameness of *battue* or drive shooting. Why? Simply because "the lean and the fat are not mixed in right proportions"—it is too much of the one to afford relish, and therefore but little pleasure is derived therefrom.

No; this "making sure" is not a healthy sign.

Whether its direct cause be a not by any means praiseworthy wish to outvie one's neighbour *in the quantity* of game shot if not in sportsmanship, or whether it has, at bottom, sheer idleness and disinclination to any exertion, as some assert, I will leave to wiser heads than mine to decide, but I certainly incline towards the latter.

We are growing lazy, at least in our sports. We like hunting because the brunt of the exertions is borne by the horse. We like yachting because there is, on an average, "idleness reigning supreme" on board of nine out of every ten yachts. We like driving because it allows us to "do nothing." In fact we like to be languidly idle, affectedly so, in everything we do for pleasure; and some aversion is almost invariably exhibited towards anything requiring energy and exertion, at least as regards our sports and pastimes.

Don't tell me to look at the increasing number of athletic meetings as an evidence that my surmises are wrong; why, it is always the same men who are in those sports, and it suits those men's vanity, or pockets, to be in them; and the fact that ten thousand visitors attend an athletic meeting does not prove at all that the majority of those spectators would like to join in the sports. Listen to them, and you will soon be undeceived if such a fancy has got into your head. Some are love-making, and the meeting affords them a chance of doing so; others are betting, and all these care about is "spotting the right man" and pocketing their opponents' cash. As to their taking the athletes' place, it would be to them the height of fun to be proposed such a thing; and, at heart, they think those athletes great donkeys to go and exhaust themselves just for the honour of the thing and a prize which is, sometimes, hardly worth contending for, and for which they (the betting-men) would

not certainly take the trouble to strip, even supposing they would have previously undergone the training necessary to make them "fit to go." And as for the general public, they look upon such exhibitions with pleasure certainly, but just as they would on any other show or exhibition ; and out of ten thousand spectators who witness a series of athletic sports, there are perhaps only half a score who *might* fancy going into the sport. As for the rest, they are no more tempted to run or otherwise exert themselves, as the athletes do, than they would, after seeing a "fire-eater" going through his performance, wish to emulate his deeds by swallowing, too, some oakum set on fire. It is unfortunate that such a tendency to "do nothing" should thus be growing amongst us, but that it is so no one will deny, except the enthusiastic reporters of certain dailies, with whom every British subject—man, woman, or child—is a hero of pluck, of endurance, of forbearance, and of chivalry. In common parlance, that is all bosh. Now this general tendency to take pleasures without any trouble has affected the genuineness of the sport of shooting. We don't go "to the mountain," we get the mountain—*i.e.* the birds—brought to us. The origin of that style is foreign to British soil, it is said. Granted; but it readily took root in it though.

Now we were treated some time last winter, by one of the illustrated weeklies, to what purported to be a day's sport for the Kaiser William; and a better farce I have never yet, either before or since, had the luck to see depicted. The Kaiser and his companion-shooters stood, if I remember right, by little tables, and their attendants were handing them their arms loaded and ready. Meanwhile, the ground in front of the shooters was covered with hares running hither and thither, but unable, of course, to break through the *cordon* of beaters and soldiers (!) who

surrounded them. At these hares the Kaiser and his distinguished guests were firing. And *that* was called sport!!! Ha, ha! I really must laugh, and I am sure every right-minded sportsman will join me in that laugh. Poor hares! I do pity them. But what sport it must have been, to be sure! I trust the Kaiser will chance to light upon this "Philosophy of Shooting," and that he will agree with me, and, at any rate, give a trial to my system, when I earnestly address him as follows: "Your Majesty ought to eschew such farces as that in which your attendants inveigle you against your own good sense, I am sure; and if you should follow the example of the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel, who tramps like a sportsman behind his dogs, and shoots his game as befits a king and a shooter, it would be all the better for your pleasure, for your health, and as an example to all whom it may concern."

King Victor Emmanuel is the king of shooters, and with him the "right mixture of good and bad luck" is justly prized. If all crowned heads gave as good an example as he does, shooting would soon become again a noble, manly sport, and not a miserable farce, fit only for weak old men and sybarites. For, after all, it is only because fashion has set its stamp on *battuing*, and it suited our fashionable shooters' natural disinclination to exert themselves, that we have taken to it; but *battuing* and driving are ridiculous, and they ought to be stamped out. That such will eventually be the case is clear, if there is any truth in what Josh Billings says: "For," says he, as Mrs. Partington would say, "thare iz nothing that kan stand the bitterness of ridicule that iz just; it will make *even* a mule wince!" Well, if ever anything *has* deserved ridicule it is certainly *battuing* and driving as now provided for our "swell" shooters; and I certainly trust that the old philosopher's

assertions will turn out right—that ridicule will make the *battue* and drive organisers wince, and that it will eventually stamp those "institutions" out of the country for good and for ever; for anything more absurdly vain and ridiculous can hardly be conceived.

The worst of it is these deplorable tricks are copied at large. Even a small farmer will resort to driving his birds if his neighbour, the Duke, does so; and it is really laughable to see what miserable attempts these awkward imitations occasionally turn out to be. The worst of them, however, is that they spoil the shooters. It is a fact that when once you have been treated to slaughter you cannot help thinking the old-fashioned way rather slow, worse luck! when compared with the new style. The wish to be always firing grows upon one; and tramping behind dogs for an hour or two without getting a shot makes you feel sour when you have previously been at a successful drive, where you had to blaze away so often and so continually that you had to use a pair of guns to give each time to cool; and wear a glove on your left hand, at any rate, if you did not wish eventually to get that hand blistered, or made very uncomfortable at any rate, by the hot barrels.

Yes, it is astonishing how quickly bad habits *do* grow upon one, and how astonishingly quick true sporting philosophy flies to the winds. We come to wish for numbers, not for sport; we hope to get plenty of firing, and wish to be spared the trouble of seeking for our game. Now I put it to all sensible men, is this as it should be? No. Then why should it be so? Are we growing "constitutionally tired," or are we "naturally lazy?" Either case does not reflect any credit upon us; and methinks a right mixture of good and bad luck would considerably enliven our sport, which is now decidedly too sybaritic to be enjoyable.

Even the use of beaters when walking through a covert, I take it, makes the fun too systematic to be thoroughly sporting.

Surely, when the frosts have nipped off most leaves in the coverts, one could very well sport there, with dogs only for beaters; and then there would be sport in finding each bird in its turn; whereas, as things are now carried on, nine-tenths of the pleasure are wasted simply because there is no instinct and no science brought to play in discovering and springing the quarry. The line of sportsmen and beaters advance, and everything before them *must* get on the move. There is no mixture of good and bad luck there, at least in finding. A thrashing-machine would do the business quite as well, and I daresay some such machines will soon be brought into use for the purpose. The shooters will sit on them in front, whilst long flails will come down by the sides, and whack the covert on either side with such mechanical precision as not to leave a "long-tail" or a bunny behind. Add to this a good trainful of birds, turned loose for the occasion, and then there would be very grand fun indeed—but where would be the sport?

I went the other day to a covert-shooting party; we were five shooters, and we had nine or ten beaters in a line with us as we went through each wood. Tick! tock! whack! went the sticks.

"Rabbit to you, sir!" calls out one of the men to my neighbour. Bang! and bunny rolls head over heels into a drain.

"Pheasant forward!" someone calls on my left. Bang, bang! The bird comes my way, still flying, though severely hit, and to spare trouble I knock it over. Then another is knocked up by my right-hand beater, and I shoot it too.

"Mark cock!" is suddenly called by someone, and the

cry is taken up by two or three. The bird evidently is coming round, and he is floored instanter.

And thus it went on, with only an intermission of an hour for luncheon. Total, eighty pheasants, five woodcocks, and an immense number of rabbits—a good bag for only four clear hours' shooting. Rare good fun, too. Very good firing practice. Very sociable entertainment. But where was the sportsmanship ?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SPORTSMEN WE ALL HAVE KNOWN.

A TOUT seigneur, tout honneur; we must begin with the *sportsman of the old school.* He, very reluctantly be it said, has had his flint gun converted into a percussion lock; but to this very day he deplores that mistake, for, according to his own account, the range formerly possessed by his weapon when it was in its primitive state was something stupendous, not to be credited but by those who were fortunate enough to be of this world at the time of its glory. Why he ever consented to have it altered he cannot make out, and fairly hints that when he took that foolish step he must have been either in liquor, ill, or labouring under some delusion.

In opinions the sportsman of the old school expresses unmitigated scorn for *battues* and drives, and calls them, rightly enough, "butchery unworthy of the name of sport." Moreover, according to him the breechloader is a stupid invention to enable the shooters to destroy in a day as much game as they would have been content in the olden (and golden) time to bag in a week. Therefore the breechloader he holds in utter abhorrence, and whenever he chances to be of a party where breechloaders are used by his companions, he purposely wastes his time when

re-loading his own antiquated fowling-piece so as to make his companions of the breechloading creed fume. None who have not witnessed the performance can picture to their minds the fiendish expression that illuminates the old boy's features, as, with a sly twinkle in his cunning old eyes, he keeps on ramming and ramming his stubborn wads, whilst the young bloods of the period are prancing for very despair. This, delights the revengeful old sinner, and the more you beseech him to make haste the more dogged grows the expression of his countenance, and the less haste he makes. Again, when actually in the stubble, he takes an unworthy pleasure in wiping his younger companions' eyes; and to crown his infamy he declares, after committing the deed, that he has not done it, that it was his gun that *would* kill at all distances.

The sportsman of the old school has invariably some very excellent dogs. Whatever may be his particular fancy as to the breed, you may be sure that his animals will be some of the best of their kind. Moreover, all his dogs are trained to retrieve, for the old man holds that if one dog can do all he requires there is no necessity whatever for him to have two, and the sight of a retriever invariably excites his risible faculties to the highest pitch.

"What do you call that black dog of yours?" says he. "That's an outlandish invention, I'll bet. What is he good for? Stay at heel, eh? Then you must spring your birds yourself, I suppose? That's very queer. What? I must have a pointer or two, just as I have now, and moreover I needs must also have a black fellow like this one behind me to go and pick up whatever I shoot. Well, that's very complicated, at any rate, and no doubt very costly too in the bargain; but I cannot see it at all, and so long as my pointers, setters, and spaniels will retrieve as well as they

do, and ever have done, none of your so-called 'retrievers proper' will do for me."

In conversation the sportsman of the old school invariably brings on the *tapis* what sport was in *his* time. This is a chief characteristic of the worthy old knight-of-the-trigger, and he boasts with just pride of the number of heads of game he has grassed and brought to bag fairly and in a sportsmanlike manner.

"None of your tricks with us, young men," he will say. "We never used to hide ourselves behind stone batteries and there wait in ambush for the wretched birds to be driven to us. Neither did we take an army of beaters for covert-shooting and select a warm corner. No, no. We went out by ourselves, and with a keeper behind us to carry our game; but even he never interfered as far as the finding of the game was concerned. That was *our* business and the dogs'; and we allowed our game the free use and exercise of their wits and wiles to elude our search, to evade our approach, and when once sprung to escape our shot. No unfairness with us. To our diligent, patient, and experienced search the birds opposed their wariness; to our skill they opposed their speed. All was fair and above-board then, and that is more than you can say with your new-fangled notions of what you call sport."

Having delivered himself thus, the old boy empties his glass and resumes puffing at his favourite old pipe.

In sporting costume the old sportsman is all pockets. Caps are to be found in all his waistcoats, and wadding has even found its way between the lining and the cloth of his coats.

In everything connected with sport the old man is bold—bolder than he would be on any other subject. But, as he is well aware that everyone pretends to look upon him and

upon his notions as being antiquated and out of place in this fast age, he brings more energy and more "fire" to bear in his arguments than he would otherwise do. It is no uncommon thing for him to get "riled" in such a manner by some innocent *double entendre* that he forthwith declines any further conversation with the offending party on the subject under discussion.

Above all things, the sportsman of the old school abhors the *sporting swell of the new school*, who seems to be his living antithesis. This young spark of the period is a vivid and melancholy example of the extremes of foppery to which a man may attain if he only lays himself out for it. This elegant shooter is elaborately got up in full shooting costume (price three guineas), and invariably possesses the costliest weapon his purse or his credit will allow him to buy, to borrow, or to hire. These high-priced instruments of warfare are not, as a rule, good killers in the hands of the swells. Somehow, it generally happens that the higher the style of the swell the less game he kills. The two are in inverse ratio.

No swell who has any self-respect will condescend to shoot without gloves; and if his means will allow him he will certainly have at least a loader, if he cannot also procure a wine and cigar bearer. Such is the spirit of the age among the rising generation of sportsmen. As to sporting dogs, most of these never have had any, and never mean to. To some of them the use of dogs is, next to incomprehensible, and the keeping and training them too great a bore to be endured. This, however, does not prevent them from giving their opinions should any discussion arise as to the merits or demerits of a dog.

Between the two extremes I have described lies the bulk of ordinary sportsmen, including the sensible part of

the shooting fraternity; men who are old enough to know how things are to be done, and unprejudiced enough to adopt those inventions which crop up, year after year, in this century of go-ahead proclivities.

Even among these, however, there are some amusingly peculiar specimens, which we shooters are bound to fall in with sooner or later, if we have not already done so.

For instance, who has not met with the *stretcher?* I employ this expression purposely, as I do not wish to be rude; but to those of my readers who may be unacquainted with the expression I will confidentially explain that in shooting circles a "stretcher" is a romancer, not to use the common and more emphatic monosyllable which describes his class. In short, he draws the long bow very freely. After this explanation I will now proceed to describe the characteristics of a "stretcher." The "stretcher's" gun is invariably the strongest, lightest, and best killing gun in the world (according to the "stretcher's" own opinion).

"This gun of mine, sir," he proceeds to tell you, "has killed a hare at a hundred and fifteen yards *and a foot!* We measured the distance with a pocket-yard, which I always carry with me on purpose to be able, whenever any similar cases arise, to measure the distances to an inch."

The best of the fun is that the "stretcher" repeats the same stories over and over again so often, that eventually he believes them himself; and then, oh! then he tells them with such truthful earnestness and sincerity that even when you know the man and his characteristics you are tempted to believe him.

Another variety of the story-telling shooters are the *self-complacent boasters.* These shoot with far better accuracy than anyone else, and they can do this and the other, until they are brought to the test, when, as a rule,

they are found "not to answer the description." To this faculty of cracking themselves up these men frequently join the usual companion quality of being immensely jealous.

The constitutionally *jealous shooter* is not a pleasant companion. If he is lucky enough to fall in with game whilst you don't he is exultantly triumphant, just as if the credit of his luck were due to his own merits. But should *you*, on the contrary, be lucky enough to shoot whilst he is idle, then you have the unpleasantness of hearing him audibly enough cursing his stars, his luck, his dogs, and his gun; and wondering why *you* should have all the luck.

The *deceitful shooter* always sends you on the wrong track whenever he has marked game. And, being a sly dog, if he does not succeed in bagging any himself, he will procure some at the first opportunity when he gets to a village; thereby giving encouragement to poaching.

Some members of this category often go to the length of securing themselves a bag before they start. They secrete the game in sundry pockets, and when a fit opportunity occurs they transfer them to the game-bag, which they forthwith lose no opportunity of ostentatiously displaying. Others make an ostensible show of starting with a definite number of cartridges, which they of course parade purposely for any witness's inspection, and they make the simulance of a thorough determination not to fire any more than that number. But all this is so much *humbug*, for this "'cute hand" has perhaps double the number of cartridges hidden about his person, and the great show he makes afterwards of the tremendous skill he must have displayed in bringing home as many head of game as he had (ostensibly) taken cartridges with him, must be looked upon as so much bosh. One of these

gentry I once took the pleasure of watching, and although he had openly "declared" twenty shots to fire, I heard him fire nearly forty. Another, who had bought a hare from a poacher without ascertaining the said hare's condition, met with an extraordinary reply from his better-half when he presented her with the animal. Said she:

"When, my dear, did you shoot this hare?"

"This morning, dear."

"Then it was high time you shot it, for it was beginning to get decomposed."

Among the enthusiastic shooters of the age must be classified the *dog-breaking sportsman.* This member of the fraternity has always on hand dogs that require finishing touches, and you hear him shout and probably swear, more or less mildly, from dawn till sunset. That is *his* pleasure. The slightest mistake he visits on the dogs with strict severity, at least in words if not in blows, and he certainly takes more trouble in this pastime than either the dogs or the game are worth; but this he does not see. Were he compelled, however, to do what he does, he would straightway consider himself the most ill-used man on the surface of this globe; but as he does it for the love of the thing, why all is for the best. A man of this stamp, however, is a man whose acquaintance is worth cultivating, as he knows a vast deal of "wrinkles" worth picking up, and is ever ready to impart his knowledge. The way to get into favour with him, without even the superficial and customary formula of an introduction, is merely to fall into ecstasies the first time you meet one of the enthusiastic dogs. Look at the animal with uplifted eyebrows, pursed-up lips, and a solemn countenance, until the dog's owner is close at hand, and then all is plain sailing. The worthy man's heart will yearn towards you. He has been hum-

bugged, jeered at, and mocked so often about his pets by those unacquainted with the "art of fowling," that he will look upon you as a downright godsend, and he will certainly enter into conversation with you at once, and think after your interview is over that you were about the most sensible man he had met with for a long time. Such is the force of a hobby that I have known a man, inaccessible to anyone on account of his irascibility, become perfectly sociable under the influence and in the company of a man whose tastes were congenial with his own. But with such sportsmen "shop" is the constant talk. You hear of nothing but "how Venus was broken of that bad habit of hers of chasing fur;" and "how Ponto got a licking once, when he was a puppy, for having killed a chicken," &c. &c., *ad libitum* —and I may add, to those not equally hobby-mad, *ad nauseam.*

CHAPTER XXIX.

SPORTSMEN WE ALL HAVE KNOWN—*Continued.*

THE man with a temper is also another type that is occasionally met with. As a rule he is invariably made the butt of all the current chaff, on account of his proclivity towards being "nasty." This man, when he misses, curses loud and deep, and everyone is to blame but himself. When his temper reaches its highest pitch the affair generally ends in an unseemly and totally uncalled-for row that spoils the day's sport. Whenever I got acquainted with a man "who had a temper" I forthwith took care ever afterwards to eschew his company; and to this very day I consider that this is the only plan to have peace, for these men will sooner lose their individuality than forswear their hastiness.

Then again there is the *mild grumbler*, who always finds fault with everything, and is never quite content and satisfied. If the weather be fine he complains that it is hot. If it is not actually warm he says he fears it will be so *by-and-by*. If the weather be unpleasant, he knew it would be so. It is always when *he* has a day's outing that the weather turns "beastly," as he disgustedly terms it.

The *free-and-easy* shooter is one whom every sportsman knows well, and whom he meets at nearly every shooting-

party. This fellow borrows from everybody cartridges and ammunition, and of course never returns it. I have known one of that class who never brought any cartridges with him at all; then, when we were all assembled and ready for a start, he would negligently ask if anyone in the company would favour him with a few cartridges of shot No. 6, his cartridges being, he used to add, all loaded with shot either too large or too small. He took me in twice; but the third time I lent a deaf ear to his *mensonges*, and he plundered someone else. To these "borrowings," our young man joined a perfect disregard for any conventionalities. He would shoot *your* bird rather than his own, and revel thereat boisterously. Limits of grounds, gamekeepers, and such-like impediments, he held in utter contempt; and if he saw game on his neighbour's land, nothing could prevent him from going boldly in pursuit of the said game. When remonstrated with he would say that restrictions were made for "*blackguards*," not for him; and he usually crowned this triumphant retort by adding that, as a proof of his earnestness, he would do again at any time just what he had done under similar circumstances. This free-and-easy man was also an intrepid shooter, and he invariably fired at whatever happened to cross his path that flew or ran—from a hedge-sparrow to a parrot escaped from its cage, from a kitten to a stray dog—anything and everything were destroyed by this clever fellow. To tell the truth, if he did not consider much what other people's opinions, tastes, or habits were, he little consulted his own comfort when shooting anything was at stake, and I have known him to wade into a river up to his armpits in order to retrieve a sandpiper. He also was bold in private life; and, and if any buxom lassie was to be found at the inn or at the farmhouse, our young man was sure to be found

within five yards of the rustic beauty at any time when he was not actually seated at the table and eating.

The opposite type to the one I have just described is that of the *nervous* sportsman, generally a young man who takes to shooting because it is *de bon ton*, but who would rather not meddle with it at all. This "*character*" shoulders his gun with misgivings and fires it at random, and is lucky when he does not hit his neighbours. The rise of a covey of partridges makes him jump; a hare that starts from her form sends a thrill through his frame and freezes his very blood. This unhappy being is in a state of continual suspense and excitement, and when the dogs are on point, for two pins he would die; drops of perspiration roll on his brow and along his pale cheeks like great beads, and his haggard look and wobegone countenance betoken a sad state of internal commotion and mental torture. One would think, by looking at him, that *he* was the party going to be shot; and if partridges were in the habit of attacking sportsmen with their redoubtable beaks and claws, or if hares were known to be man-eaters, our poor fellow could not be more tremblingly and perplexingly anxious than he is when, with trembling limbs and throbbing heart, he approaches the game.

And now we come to the *tipplers* and the *gamesters*, for, there are, amongst sportsmen, two such classes, and pretty numerous they seem to be by all accounts.

The *tippler* drinks a "drop" after "a miss" as well as after "a hit." To him everything is a fit subject for a visit to his large flask. Does he meet a companion, the first thing is naturally the comparing of the bags, after which the bottle is produced and the silver cup handed round. I once saw two friends of mine meeting accidentally thus at the corner of a wood. After the usual

preliminary talk both, as a matter of course, pulled out pistols from their pockets, and there they stood grinning at each other like two monkeys!

The *gamester* is a scarcer specimen among shooters than any other variety, as naturalists would say; but still there are some men, unworthy of the honour of carrying a gun, who prefer gambling to shooting, even when in the field! I know two such "*cures*," who never meet in their rambles but they must needs seek a sheltered nook or sit down behind a hedge, light a pipe, and, producing a pack of cards, proceed to play a game or two. Nothing disturbs them. The passion of gambling conquers victoriously the passion of shooting, and when once they have begun, they are "in" for it for the rest of the day, or at least until their stomachs proclaim that hunger is being felt there, when luncheon is discussed; but after luncheon card-playing and gambling are resumed.

The next variety on my list is that of the *fussy* shooter. This specimen keeps you up late at night making cartridges to an unlimited number for fear you should run short on the next day, although you may have hundreds of cartridges already. Finally, you get tired, and, giving it up, you retire to bed; but at 1 A.M. Fussy pulls you about in your bed and tells you to get up. You start and sit up; you rub your eyes, look at the clock, then at your watch; and then, when certain of the time, you mildly wish to be informed if Fussy is mad.

"Why get up now?" you remonstrate.

"Because we must be ready in time," replies your bothering companion.

"But we don't start till 5 o'clock."

"That's just it."

"But it is only 1 o'clock!"

"I know that. It will give us time to look over our things to see that nothing will be wanted in the course of the day, and to breakfast comfortably."

"Oh, hang the breakfast!" you crossly suggest.

But Fussy will not be denied; and get up you must and shall, and finally you do. And there you are, shivering in your nightshirt. Fussy, in order to hasten your motions, opens the windows. The damp night air invades the room and chills you to the very bone; this has the desired effect of hastening you to put on your clothes. Fussy, meanwhile, is in his glory; and he forthwith stalks triumphantly downstairs, there to wait for you and to fuss about something else. But so soon as you are alone you look out of window. All is pitch dark and uninviting; the night dew is heavily falling; you shiver and shut the windows. Then you yawn; you look again at the clock; you yawn again. Insensibly you get nearer to your bed, and lo! you turn in again, without knowing yourself how you did it. Not for long though, for you have hardly closed your poor *peepers* when up comes Fussy again, and this time he does not leave you until you accompany him to the breakfast-table, where lights are lugubriously burning, and a scared servant girl, sleepy and annoyed, upsets everything. Outside, the groom, grumbling at his master's folly, is putting the mare in the shafts, there to wait at least two hours before we start.

We all have known the *over-careful* shooter—he who is continually taking his cartridges out for fear of accidents; he who dislikes to handle a gun, even when not loaded, for fear it should go off, *of its own accord*, as a man of that class once told me. In the field the over-careful man is perpetually putting his gun at half-cock, and if you are unlucky enough to be his neighbour you hear, all day, the

click! click! of his gun-locks. Generally, with his over-carefulness, the man misses his best chances, as the game, almost invariably, springs up from under his very feet when his gun is at half-cock or else unloaded.

The *careless* shooter, on the contrary, keeps his gun always loaded, even at home, and even there it is frequently not only loaded but at full-cock, and ready to go off at the slightest provocation. In the field this man jumps ditches, scrambles over walls, and crawls through hedges with both hammers "up and ready." If a chance of firing occurs, and you are at his elbow, he does not mind blazing away close to your ear, thereby making you deaf for at least that day, if not longer. He fires at hares when the dogs are nearly upon them, and if remonstrated with, swears that his gun "does not spread," and that there was not the slightest danger for the dogs. Once I saw a careless shooter whose gun's breech, for some reason best known to itself, would not open. The sportsman tried and tried again to open it, all in vain. Finally, he *looked into the barrels!* Be it borne in mind that both hammers were at full-cock, and the gun was loaded! This class of men are not only careless of their own safety, but their recklessness towards others is next to incredible. Heaven preserve you from having such a neighbour when "doing" a thick covert; for, rather than miss a woodcock or a pheasant, the man would fire, even at the risk of blowing your brains out; and if a hare or a rabbit bolts your way, what cares he if a handful of shot gets inserted in your legs? Such minor considerations would not stop him; and if anyone grumbles at such rough usage, the reckless sportsman wishes to know why the complaining party does not remain at home.

And now, reader, I will conclude this series of rough

sketches by a short description of the most amusing of all the types of shooters—I mean the *gourmand.* The gourmand is generally a fat man who goes out shooting with a twofold end in view—viz. to keep down his corpulence and to bring home tid-bits. This man does not *kill* much, but whatever he kills, *that* he duly prizes. He who has not seen a fat gourmand racing with the dogs for fear they should spoil the woodcock he has just grassed, has seen nothing. There he comes, panting and blowing like a steam thrashing-machine, and the very ground trembles under his mighty weight. He picks up the bird, anxiously looks it well over, and triumphantly proclaims that it is all right. Then he weighs it carefully in one hand, then in the other, and finally gives it as his opinion that it is within an ounce or so as heavy, or else heavier, than the one he shot previously. Then he launches forth into a glowing description as to how he will have them both cooked, and his very mouth waters at his own words. He is a happy man, and in that hour of glory he is obliging and open-handed. The fat gourmand, being thus easily satisfied in point of sport, is cherished by his companions-of-the-trigger, not only on that account, but also on account of his great cheerfulness and buoyancy of spirits. The fat gourmand generally sings willingly enough, and has a good stock of jolly songs. He is sociable, and nearly drink-proof, so that it not unfrequently happens that, after a fine dinner, he is the only man who knows what he is about, and to him behoves the care of seeing all the others safely "housed" or "carted." This he attends to with a motherly care, and the grateful tipplers, when reason returns, vote him *a brick* of the first order. That is the greatest compliment they can pay him, and he becomes eventually to be looked upon by the others as a sort of safety-guard, in whose com-

pany they may freely indulge themselves to their hearts' content. Hence his great popularity; and there is hardly a sociable shooting-party where the fat gourmand sportsman does not prominently shine.

SHOOTING ON THE CONTINENT.

SHOOTING ON THE CONTINENT.

CHAPTER XXX.

CONTINENTAL SPORTSMEN, BREAKERS, AND POACHERS.

THE most peculiar feature one may notice in connection with sport as carried on on the Continent is the happy-go-lucky and careless way in which the sportsmen set about it when once the season has been fairly entered upon. The opening day, however, is an exception to the rule ; for, days before that memorable event comes to pass, most of the shooters are positively frantic as regards their guns, game-bags, dogs, &c., but after two or three days' sport they relapse into that *dolce-far-niente* style that pervades all things continental, business and pleasure alike. On the first day only is there any emulation worth speaking of among the shooters, and they seem to have tacitly agreed that the value of a shooting, and the skill of a shooter, should be reckoned according to the number of heads of game the said shooter can bag over that shooting on the first day. This is queer, but it has a great advantage—viz. that of allowing the sportsmen soon to relapse into their quiet, idle

ways; and it also induces them not to pursue their game throughout the season with that ardour and feverish excitement which emulation to outvie our neighbours prompts amongst ourselves, to the rapid destruction of our stock. Such a thing never happens abroad. Provided a man who holds a shooting succeeds, fairly or not, in showing off a good bag *à l'ouverture*, he does not fret much about the rest of his game for the remainder of the season; and when he goes over his ground he smokes his pipe, his cigar, or his cigarette, with a nonchalance that one never, or at least very rarely, sees in our own fields.

The fact is, whatever a Briton undertakes to do, that he does right well with a vengeance, and sometimes even, as in the case of sport, he carries this spirit, I venture to say, a little too far. The way three or four British shooters set about beating a field is a caution to the game to be found thereon; for they mean murder, and no mistake. They go on in a business-like way, and woe to him among them who is inclined to "lark;" and if a head of game manages to escape the guns, the shooters consider it very little short of a calamity.

This, I think, is carrying matters a little too far. Shooting, after all, is a pleasure; and why one should set about pursuing it with a frown upon one's countenance, I do not very clearly see. No, we are too systematic and too business-like in that matter. On the other hand, some Continental shooters, I think, are too much the other way. I don't pretend to say that such men are very enthusiastic sportsmen (the reverse is probably the case), but if so, it would be just as well for such to stay at home as to perambulate the fields with their guns slung on their backs and their hands in their pockets; for precious little do they bag whilst they go on in that way.

However, it is quite a matter of taste, and therefore cannot be satisfactorily discussed. Even, however, those Continental shooters who pride themselves on being *bons chasseurs*, exhibit a certain amount of carelessness that is not without its charm.

One whose acquaintance I made a few years ago in the north of France was the very type of that class. He was a brewer of some standing, and having, besides, some private means of his own, he took matters easy in every respect, both as regarded his business and as concerned his sport. He nevertheless had well-nigh everything that the most fastidious shooter could wish to possess, and he knew how to make use of it too; but, withal, in a quiet, passionless manner that was very refreshing. He held some neighbouring downs on lease, and the said downs being very thickly populated with rabbits, he frequently (well, three days on an average in every week) paid them a visit with his ferrets. It was quite a treat to see him make his start, with an old fishing-basket slung on his back over his game-bag, and containing his two ferrets. At his heels trotted an old setter bitch who thoroughly knew her business; and off they would go towards the downs, making, however, a stoppage along the road at every one of the three *cabarets* that offered their refreshments to the weary or thirsty traveller. I never knew him to forget *that* part of the business; in fact, his habits were so well known that from ever so far, when anyone belonging to either of the inns saw him coming, they would unhesitatingly shout out: "Here is Monsieur B.! *Apportez sa chope!*" And accordingly the glass of beer was brought out ready for him to drink. Why he persistently drank beer, and nothing else, was, I suppose, because he was a brewer himself, and wished to show a good example. Howbeit, when-

ever I chanced to be with him the above programme was invariably and faithfully carried out to the letter, to the evident satisfaction of all parties concerned; for I verily believe that if B. had chanced to go by and had neglected to enter his accustomed inns it would have well-nigh broken the hearts of those who kept them, so accustomed were they to see him enter their dwellings.

Well, at last we would reach the downs, and the old bitch, which had preceded us thither for some little time, would be discovered pointing at a hole.

"Zere is somesing zere!" B. would say slowly, in his broken English; and, without looking, he would put his hand in his basket, collar one of the ferrets (it did not matter which—they were both good ones), and put him down to the hole, and say to it, "*Allons, va!*" Then we would stand by, according to our ideas of the way the rabbit or rabbits would bolt, with the bitch behind one of us, ready to start. Out bunny would come, and be floored or missed, according to the fortune of war, without eliciting any comment whatsoever from my companion.

This apathy was not to be wondered at. When a man has been shooting rabbits for over twenty years the sport may well end by becoming tame.

There is, however, on the Continent, a class of shooters that we have not on our side of the Channel, and it is that of the professional shooters, men who subsist entirely upon the proceeds of the game they shoot.

These men are sharp enough, and can vie with anybody for attention to their work on hand. Their ranks are recruited amongst all classes of society, strange as it may appear, and I will by-and-by explain the reason for this.

I must, however, first point out how it is that these men

can at all pursue their vocation. In most parts of the Continent the land is so much cut up and divided amongst numerous owners that, virtually, the whole is thrown open to anyone who chooses to take out a licence and shoot over it. In some places the extent of such free ground is rather considerable, and it is over such ground that the professional shooters sport and manage to live. Not that they make a "pot of money" by their calling; but as living is cheap in the villages, one or two heads of game shot every day fetch enough at the market to keep the man going, and that is all he cares for. Generally he undertakes also to train dogs for the *bourgeois* of the town, and that brings him in contact with a class of gentlemen who, if they are pleased with his services and like his general ways and manners, patronise him to some extent, take him with them occasionally on their preserves, and thus help him to get along comfortably. The majority of these men were formerly workmen, or peasants, or farm labourers, whom the instinct and the passion of sport have induced to give up their hard labour and small pay for an employment far more suited to their tastes and more congenial to their feelings. These men, who, as a rule, were invariably astonishingly idle when employed in the workshop, in the fields, or at the farm, now are most industrious in their calling. They are up before dawn in all weathers, and nothing stops their going out on their rounds, for their hearts are in their work, and some of them would rather commit suicide than give up shooting, so strong is the passion for it in their natures.

On the other hand, some of these professionals have been in good positions before, and it was that same love of sport, carried to too great an extent, that brought them to so low a standard as compared with their former com-

parative affluence. Who has not heard of such cases? I knew, ten years ago, a young farmer who was left, at the age of twenty-one, owner of a good farm in a very good and profitable district. Unfortunately for him, he had the habit of indulging his tastes without brooking restraint or control. He had a passion for shooting, and he gave himself up to it, body and soul. He soon got the reputation of being the best shot in the *département*; and that tickled his vanity so much that he did not mind people shaking their heads over his proceedings, and saying that he was going to the dogs. In truth he was though. And how could it possibly be otherwise? It did not matter what urgent business he had on his hands, the moment someone turned up and told him about a covey of birds or a hare near at hand, he would give up at once whatever he was actually doing, take up his gun, whistle his dog, and be off after the game. Of course during his absence all went wrong on the farm. His labourers neglected their work, robbed and plundered him to their hearts' content, in due fulfilment of the saying, "Like master, like man." The consequence of all this was, that the young fellow experienced heavy losses through neglecting his harvest, &c., and he had to sell his land, field after field, in order to keep up his standard of gentility; for I must add that he had, in his shooting perambulations, become acquainted with some men better off than himself, to imitate whom he fairly drained his own resources. Finally, all was sold; his ruin was completed within five short years, and he is now a mere professional, living from day to day and from hand to mouth, depending on what his gun will bring down during the season to keep a wife and three or four children. This lamentable case is not the only one that has come to my knowledge; and other young men of a far

higher standing than he have been brought, by the same means, to the same end. These, gentlemen by birth, are in a far worse plight than all the others; for whereas a common labourer's wife may go openly and sell in the market whatever her husband has shot, the ex-swell who is reduced to the same way of getting a living dares not show himself or send anyone related to him to the market-place with his game. His pride revolts against that course of action. He would not like anyone to know decisively his real position, though they may guess at it. Selling one's game on the Continent is considered one of the very lowest means of living; and he could not brook the thought that people would class him amongst the lowest of the low. Yet what is he to do? "Necessity knows no law;" and he must manage in some way. He arranges, then, privately with somebody, to buy off from him, cheap, all he gets, and thus loses a good part of the value of his game. Besides which, though he may break a dog or two during the season and sell them, he cannot, like his poorer *confrères*, take in dogs to break for the *bourgeois* of the town. He considers himself their equal, and would not lower himself in their estimation by undertaking to do for them the work of a menial. And so it comes to pass that he drinks to the very dregs the cup of poverty. Although his standing has remained openly the same, yet his position appears doubtful, suspicious; and people shake their heads and wonder how he lives, and so forth. His very friends fight shy of him merely because of the *honte* and ill-flavour that his pursuit carries along with it. In fact, all over the Continent nothing worse can be said of a gentleman than that he sells his game for his living; "*Il vend son gibier pour vivre*," they say; and then they look upon him with something uncommonly like contempt and loathing.

The number of such men is greater than one would be tempted to believe. There is hardly a village, a hamlet, or a small country town, where one, or two, or more of them are not to be found. Yet, in spite of the low rank they are brought to occupy in the scale of society, these men do not wish to alter their condition under any circumstances. I have known an instance where one of these gentlemen professionals refused a good post under Government on the ground that it would take him away from his shooting.

No, such men will be very grateful to you for an invitation to a day's sport; but they think it the height of impudence (!), not to say unkindness, on your part to propose to them any employment, however gentlemanly and light, that would improve their position, if it should in any way interfere with the gratification of their sporting propensities!

Besides professional shooters, there are, on the Continent, wherever there is game to be found, innumerable poachers; but these, unlike ours, do not resort to driving the hares and shooting the roosting pheasants. Poachers there usually "wire" the hares and net the birds. They do singly and quietly what our poachers do by sheer force and numbers. The French poachers are remarkably clever in setting their snares, astonishingly so indeed. I have been repeatedly astounded at their skill. It does not matter what species of game they have set their hearts upon having, but, by hook or by crook, they will have it! They have a knack of setting a noose, whether it be a brass wire for hares, or horsehair loops for partridge or snipe, that no hare, or partridge, or snipe, can escape. When such men are made keepers—as, indeed, is eventually generally the case—and they make up their minds to destroy hawks, weasels, polecats, and the like, within three

months the manor is completely cleared of all vermin. When, however, the lessee or owner of a shooting will persistently ignore them, they soon destroy all his game, in spite of his keeper, who oftener than not is getting drunk on bad beer and worse *eau de vie* at the nearest *cabaret*, whilst the lonely wirer is doing his work of destruction. There are also village poachers who employ the gun, but such men do not go boldly on any preserved estate; they are content with the communal ground, and merely dispense with the usual licence. They have, during the day, noticed a hare's run, and they forthwith make up their minds to have a pop at her. A man of that class generally has but a single-barrelled gun—oftentimes the *mousquet* or *mousqueton* that he had to use when he was a soldier. Well, evening has set in, the *Angelus* has been rung at the steeple of the village church, the cattle are in their stables, all the rural sounds are dying out one by one; now is his time. He takes the gun to pieces, and easily hides it under his blouse. He then slips out of his thatched cottage, and perhaps calls at a friend's on his way to the fields. He finds the family at supper; they ask him to sit down. No, he is in a hurry, and with a significant smile and a wink he gives a tap with his knuckle against the gun-barrel. The eldest boy there present opens his eyes, and hints that he would like to go with him. The father's consent is never slow to be given (peasants are always poachers at heart, more or less), and presently the boy and the man get away slyly, through a back lane where no one ever goes when once night has set in. There they are, noiselessly making their way, when suddenly the poacher, who is walking first, stops, takes the boy by the arm, and pulls him behind an old outhouse, where they remain silent and almost breathless. They hear a footstep. It is

the *garde champêtre* coming back again to the village after his last round. He passes by quietly smoking his pipe, and his footsteps die away in the streets of the village. Now the coast is clear, and the man and boy start again, and this time with more confidence. They have left the village behind them, and it has disappeared in the evening mists that rise from the valley; they walk on and on until they reach the field near the covert where the man intends to wait in ambush. He places the boy comfortably against a hedge, puts his gun together, and loads it carefully.

"Now," says he, "remain here until I come for thee, boy."

And away he goes, and his blouse soon grows fainter in the gloom. The boy shivers, partly with cold and partly with fright; but as the moon rises he is enabled to perceive his companion at the foot of a tree, some sixty yards away, and that cheers him up a bit. He watches and watches, and by-and-by he sees the man getting ready; he sees him aiming deliberately at a dark spot, and the boom of the gun makes him jump out of his hiding-place, when the man rushes up to him breathlessly.

"I have got it! there it is!" he says proudly, as he holds up for the boy's admiration a fine hare, murdered in cold blood; and when they get back again to the boy's home they are both congratulated on their pluck, and the poacher goes to bed that night with the consciousness that he is indeed a very brave and a very clever fellow. Very brave, forsooth! for having evaded a perhaps one-armed or half-blind *garde champêtre's* vigilance! and very clever, for having shot a hare, sitting on her haunches, within twenty yards of the muzzle of his gun!

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONTINENTAL SPORTSMEN, BREAKERS, AND POACHERS—*Continued.*

THERE is also among Continental shooters an individual taste for particular branches of sport, which our own shooters but rarely exhibit. A British shooter does not mind at all, as a rule, *what* he is going to shoot; provided he shoots *something*; but not so with the majority of sportsmen on the Continent.

Some of these have a strong partiality for hares, and accordingly one sees nothing but beagles or harriers about their places. Others prefer partridge-shooting, and these affect the companionship of spaniels, setters, or pointers, in preference to any other breeds of dogs. Others delight in marshes, and do nothing but flounder in their bogs all the season through. Finally, some have a passion for rabbit-shooting, and these breed terriers and ferrets by the dozen.

You will find, moreover, that the hare-shooter will look upon the man who is fond of partridge-shooting, or upon the one who is "snipe-struck," or upon the "rabbit-fancier," with a contempt and disgust which is in each case thoroughly reciprocated.

It is not, however, so much a matter of fanciful taste that is at the bottom of these different fancies, as a matter of locality. There are but few Frenchmen who travel about

as we do in search of sport; the majority remain in their villages, hamlets, or country towns; and, naturally enough, through having to enjoy the kind of sport that their own ground round about their respective places affords, they take a liking to that kind of sport, and eventually it grows as a strong habit upon them.

Now such instances of peculiarities cannot be noticed so well in the British Kingdom, on account of the generally unsociable ways of the land. On the Continent there is not one single sportsman, perhaps, who does not frequent some *café* or other, where he meets regularly, and at least once a day, his brother-shooters. It is, then, in these daily *rêunions* that the shooters' respective individualities shine. There never is a row, mind. They are all too well-bred to say anything coarse or rude; but the good-humoured chaff and satire are all but irresistible. Everyone turns up in the evening at the *café du chasseur* (or at some *café* devoted to the craft), accompanied by his dog or dogs, no matter how numerous or how unwelcome they may be, for the Continental sportsman is as proud of his animal, or animals, as of himself. He never goes anywhere without them. Even when he goes to the barber for a shave his canine companions are with him; so that by his very attendants the shooter betrays his favourite sport, and is perfectly satisfied with the fact.

I was frequently much amused by listening to the general conversation in the *cafés* when, of an evening, I was there, having a game at billiards (to rest my legs after a hard day's sport, I presume), or a quiet game at *écarté*. Sometimes it would happen that all those present were of the same "sporting creed," when there was no discussion worth speaking of going on, and everyone was intent on playing his game with due care; but presently the door

would open, and two or three hare-beagles would enter boldly, preceding their master, who, with two or three hares in his bag and his gun on his shoulder, would make his appearance, and after a friendly nod all round to his friends and acquaintances, he would unburden himself, sit down, empty a glass at a gulp, order another, and then the discussion would begin and be continued with good-humoured *repartie* until one or other of the parties got up to leave.

As regards the dogs, these animals are far more happy with their Continental masters than they are with us. In spite of many assertions to the contrary, I do not believe that dogs were made to be chained up to, or shut up in, their kennels. Dogs are essentially companionable, and it seems hard to keep them imprisoned in seclusion, when they are not actually required for sport. In fact, anyone who will take the trouble to notice it, will see that a companion dog that has been nicely treated positively looks at you with reproach in his eyes when you offer to chain him up. He seems to wonder what can have brought such a disgrace upon him; and, in truth, it is a disgrace and a torture. Howbeit, with the great majority of British shooters, a dog is an instrument to be prized, more or less according to his degree of usefulness. Beyond that, nothing more is elicited from the average British owners. Not so with the Continental men. Their dog is for them not only an instrument, but a friend, and it oftentimes happens that the love of the man for the dog as a companion is so great that the defects of the dog, as a sporting-dog, are passed over and unnoticed by its master. Not that he does not perceive them. He is fully aware that his dog ought really to be more stanch than he is—that he ought not to chase fur, that he ought not to crunch his game, and so forth.

But then, since he will do it, let him, says he. Rather than sell or otherwise part with him and get a better one, they prefer keeping their companion because *they like him.* Now, I think such a way of doing things very nice, very poetical, and all that; but, nevertheless, that is a little too much the other way to our own.

Shooting over dogs is a most annoying and vexing sport when the dogs are not perfect; therefore why submit to having your sport ruined and your temper ruffled for the comfort of a dog? I don't see it. Consequently, in so far as that goes, I do not agree with my Continental friends; and I have over and over again remonstrated with them, whenever I saw them deliberately allowing their dogs their own way rather than get rid of them.

On the other hand, by our system of secluding the dogs from ourselves, we don't get from the dog half the talent and fun that we ought. The dogs are estranged from their masters when shut up or chained up, and when taken out for sport they hunt for themselves, and do not pay much attention to anybody else. If stanch, well and good; but if inclined to be wild, then woe be to the sport. Taken all in all, we always succeed as well as, and generally better, than our neighbours; but that is because our breeds of dogs are incomparably better than theirs, not that they are better broken. I have never seen any dogs so well broken as on the Continent. What a French, German, or Belgian dog-breaker will not teach his pupils I do not know.

I will tell you what I have seen, and that will give you an idea of the perfection to which dog-breaking, for general work, has been brought among our neighbours.

I had, when abroad, seen an advertisement in one of my English papers, offering a very handsome, but unruly, black-and-tan setter for sale. I wrote about it, and the man who

had the dog for sale candidly stated that he could do nothing with him, but that he was of good descent, and as such ought to turn out well.

Now I wanted, at the time, the services of a good pedigree setter as a stud-dog; therefore, so far, the advertised dog suited my requirements. I accordingly bought it, and it was forthwith sent over to me.

He was a magnificent dog, and I was perfectly satisfied with my bargain. When I had had him some little time I resolved to try him, for the fun of the thing, and I took him out alone. A more wild and disorderly ranger it never was my lot to behold, and he showed directly his capabilities for mischief. He flushed every bird he could scent, and he had a splendid nose, so that nothing escaped his notice. He coursed a half-grown hare like a greyhound, and killed it. He then came upon a fowl along the road, and twisted its neck; and goodness only knows what next he would have done if I had not secured him. Now the shooting season being just beginning, I could not think of entertaining the idea of breaking the dog myself just then; so I invariably afterwards left it at home, and took with me my broken dogs; but of an evening I generally allowed Don to come with me in town, and wherever he went everybody admired him, he was so handsome. Well, one evening, a Belgian gentleman said to me:

"How old is your dog? Not more than two years? If I were you I would get him broken."

"I intend breaking him myself," I said; "but he is so wild I must wait until game gets a little scarcer, when I can take him out then and devote all my attention to him; for you know you can't break a dog and bag game at the same time."

"True. But," said he, "if I were you I would not take

the trouble. For £3 or £4 you will get your dog beautifully broken by a professional."

"Broken to what?"

"To stand and retrieve from land and from water."

"And how long would it take the man?"

"A month or so."

"I would not mind giving him six weeks, and extra pay too, and have the work well done."

"Well, we will go and see him now if you like."

And we went.

In the suburbs of the town was a small wooden, one-roomed place, built in the sand, among the downs. Before we got to within a hundred yards of the place numerous and loud barks told us that good watch was kept there at any rate; and soon four or five dogs came running towards us, and fraternised with Don, who, however, did not seem "to see it." The man himself then turned up, and invited us in, when we explained the object of our visit. But what a queer place this professional's abode was! On the walls were spiked collars, chains, pegs, ordinary collars, coils of string, a whip or two, an old pin breechloader, and a net game-bag much the worse for wear. In a corner was a bed. Opposite was a microscopic stove, under which the dogs were all stretched and roasting themselves. Four wooden chairs and a strong table constituted all the furniture. On a shelf were cooking utensils—*i.e.* a plate and a frying-pan; and that was all.

What do you think of my château?" asked the man. "Very snug, is it not? Well, now let us see about business. You say he is two years old," he added, looking at Don. "Hum! I think he is more. Nevertheless, I will do my best for him, and if he does not turn out well it won't be *my* fault!" And he waved his arm like a man who is giving a

smart cut with the whip, and he winked at us. "I will let you know gradually how he gets on. Yes, five or six weeks won't be too much."

So saying, he pulled Don to the wall, where a chain was already fixed, hooked him there, placed a pot full of water near the dog, and we went our way.

Of course when I got up Don sprang up too; but "moral persuasion" goes a long way, and he resumed his former attitude very speedily. Evidently he was *in strict hands*, and *that* impressed me favourably.

Well, five or six weeks after, true to our agreement, the professional made his appearance at my place with the dog; for we had agreed that we should officially try him together, and on the principle "No cure, no pay," I was to pay the man £5 if the dog were fit, or take him away and only pay £1 for his keep if he were not suitably broken.

Well, instead of wildly running about and upsetting everything, as he used to do, the dog was soberly keeping at the man's heels.

"*Couche là!*" said the man; and the dog unhesitatingly laid down.

I got ready, and we started.

I knew a good turnip-field within half a mile of the town, where the remnants of a covey were to be found; and towards that field we accordingly directed our footsteps. On our way the dog ranged beautifully, and found a single bird in a small clover-field.

"He has a splendid nose, sir," the man said. "I have seen him scenting partridges a hundred yards or more away from him. See, now, how steady he stands."

He might have said, "See how comfortably he is lying down," for the dog was stretched at full length along the

clover, and but for his eyes, that turned towards us, might have been thought dead.

Well, I went up, the partridge rose, I floored it, and the dog never moved.

"*Va chercher!*" said the man.

And up he bounded towards the spot where the partridge had fallen, found the bird instantly, turned it over with his nose, took it up by the wing, and brought it to us.

"*Assis! assis!*" repeated the man, lifting up his hand.

And the dog *sat down before him*, to give him the bird.

I could hardly believe my own eyes. And so this was the Don that was so untractable before. It was wonderful, but it was not extraordinary—*considering the means employed.* In fact the dog was absolute obedience, and a better dog I never had. I shot over him that season and half the next, when, being in England at the time, one of my shooting friends made me a handsome offer for the dog, and I sold it to him. He has got it now.

The only difficulty at first was the language; for, as the dog's breaker spoke French, it followed that the dog did not know what we meant when we spoke English; but after some shooting practice he soon got into the habit of working by signs, and eventually a snap of the fingers and a sweep of the hand were enough to make him understand what he was required to do. Now, this is the *acme* of perfection. A dog that is stanch, and requires no speaking to, is invaluable to a shooter.

The Belgian Baron de K. has four pointers, imported from England, but broken in Continental style, who work without a word being addressed to them from morning till

evening. The Baron works them himself in the following manner: He puts his gun over his left arm, and holds a white handkerchief in his right hand. This handkerchief he waves to the right or to the left occasionally, when he wishes the dogs to quarter either side, and you never hear a word spoken all day to the pointers, except for retrieving, when the word "*Apporte*" is spoken, and that is all. Now, I simply call this superb, and the sight, the first time I was present, fairly took my breath away.

"You have good dogs in England," said the Baron to me many times, "but good breakers are scarce there."

And that is but too true. The few good breakers we have waste their time and talents on lumberly and noseless retrievers, to the neglect of our thoroughly sporting pointers, setters, and spaniels. The more the pity. If they would only do by these latter as fairly as they do by the cross-bred Newfoundlanders, they would beat the Continental breakers into fits. But then they won't.

The same thing, again, happens for coursing-dogs. I don't mean the dogs used for official meetings, but those used by country gentlemen and well-to-do farmers for private coursing—*i.e.* coursing merely for the sport of the thing, and for the table. Well, I don't believe there are six greyhounds in the British Kingdom (except those that belong to professional poachers) that are fit to be used for private coursing. As a rule, the gentleman who loves a morning's coursing now and then for the supply of his larder, has to fight every time with his greyhounds for the possession of their hare when they have killed it, and then finds it torn to pieces or half eaten away; and that is where I think something might be done. Greyhounds are not so stupid as we give them credit for. Those that are stupid

we have made so by our senseless system of for ever having them secured, unless actually running. But a greyhound, treated properly, is as sensible as any other dog, and he can be taught, as readily as any other breed, that he is not to destroy his game when he has caught it. That is the first point. The next is to teach him to retrieve it. Then it is a treat and a pleasure to go coursing. But, as things now stand, it is just the reverse.

"Run, John, run," shouts the sportsman to his keeper, or attendant; "they have caught her!"

And worthy John has to run as fast as his legs can carry him; then extemporises a fight with the dogs, for what? Half a hare and its legs, which the dogs, as a rule, disdain to devour. Whereas, should the greyhounds have been properly taught, one might go, as the Belgian coursers do, with one's hands in one's pockets, smoke a pipe or a cigar, and enjoy thoroughly the fun, without any trouble or annoyance. And again, the Belgian sportsmen's system of making companions of their dogs tells favourably, both when entering the dogs to game and also when making them retrieve, for the following reasons—viz. that as the dogs, when puppies, are always free, and, when able to take care of themselves, as they always accompany their masters everywhere, they gradually get accustomed to all the sights of the fields, and farms, and villages, so that they never dream afterwards of chasing sheep, killing fowls, &c., as secluded puppies do when brought out in earnest when of age to begin work; and on the other hand, the very children, when playing with the young puppies, teach them to retrieve things for fun, and this eventually proves a capital accomplishment when the dogs are brought on game.

To resume, then, I think, as the Baron de K. said, that

though we have the best and handsomest sporting-dogs in the world, their breaking is now, as a rule, shamefully neglected; and I honestly think that such ought not to be the case for the sporting-dogs of the most sporting nation on the face of the earth.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FREE SHOOTINGS ON THE CONTINENT.

THE season 1876 has proved, I was told from many quarters, a most excellent one as regards game; and on the Continent birds were said to have bred extremely well, and sportsmen who had gone there had therefore enjoyed very good sport.

For the information of those of my readers who would like to take a trip abroad, I would mention several spots well known to myself, where they would indubitably enjoy themselves, if "our warm corners" of the past seasons have not spoilt them and made them wish for everlasting firing, to the total exclusion of any "fagging."

Now in view of the great number of British sportsmen who are year after year deprived of their shootings, on account of the great increase in value of these precious luxuries, I trust a short account of what may be done abroad, within easy distance of England, will prove of some interest to many shooters.

I have already treated the subject as regards hiring shootings in Belgium,* but now I will extend my information to Holland and France as well, and will confine myself to the sort of sport that a wandering shooter might expect to meet there. By wandering shooter let me not be misunder-

* See my "Shooting and Fishing Trips in England, France, Alsace, Belgium, Holland, and Bavaria."

stood. I do not mean that a man may go over the mackerel-ditch, land (say) in Holland, and walk from thence indiscriminately over the lands until he has crossed the North of Holland, of Belgium, and of France. Such a trip might have been undertaken fifty years ago, perhaps, with little or no molestation, but now *les temps sont changés*; if you do not know where to go you are likely to be caught fifty times a day, and it is more than probable that the trip would be nipped in its very bud.

As regards the northern coasts of the Continent, from the River Ems down to the River Loire, shooting there is free to all comers. In fact, in Belgium, shore-shooting is allowed all the year round; but as concerns marsh-shooting it may be assumed that it begins on the 1st of August every year without any change whatever, even if the 1st should fall on a Sunday. In the latter case, if it were in England, there would be of course no shooting; but the Dutch, Belgians, and French look upon Sunday as *the* day for enjoyment, and therefore do not scruple to shoot then.

Well then, those British shooters who are fond of snipe and duck shooting, and who have no particular wish to remain in the British Islands, may begin their sport over the water two or three days after this paper will have appeared in *Bell's Life*, viz.: on the 1st August.

As regards general shooting, the dates vary for each department, and have to be ascertained. As for sport, it depends very much upon the spot where one pitches; but I may here premise that a great deal of attention has of late been drawn to shootings everywhere, that as a matter of fact the laws are now very strictly enforced, and that there never was better sport to be obtained than now on the Continent in a moderate way, as I hinted in my preliminary remarks.

Where to go must now be left to the shooter's decision. Some men prefer snipe-shooting to anything, others are "rabbit struck," whereas wildfowlers care not to fire a shot unless it be at ducks, widgeon, or teal, &c.

For snipe-shooting I would recommend generally the north of Holland, the northern zone of Belgium, and certain spots in France which I will name separately. In Holland the whole coast is marshy, and snipe abound wherever the draining has not been carried out too strictly, and even then there is always a pretty nice bag to be made; but wherever there is a wilderness of bogs, there one may expect to enjoy himself to his heart's content. The trouble, however, of shooting there is great, on account of the land being intersected so very frequently by canals, ditches, rivers, &c., so that crossing the streams gets rather tiring and bothering, especially in those wild spots where even plank bridges are unused, and where the peasants never journey abroad without their leaping-poles when business or sport brings them into the marshes.

As to particular spots, it would be rather invidious to choose amongst such a plethora of good things. I would, however, recommend the shores of the Escaut, as abounding with birds, and leave will be readily obtained from the villagers to shoot over their meadows and pastures.

In fact, with courtesy, a sportsman is mostly everywhere well received, and a hearty dinner given to two or three of the notables will ensure the giver free scope to his ranging.

In some spots one may shoot alone with tolerable safety and comfort, but as a rule a guide and pole-carrier will be found an absolute necessity.

Let the shooter provide all his shooting gear in England, as Dutch concerns will not suit his tastes. Powder, however, he cannot bring over; in fact, it is not allowed

to be landed at any of the seaports; therefore a "note should be made of it." I had once a provision of cartridges confiscated, and since then I have taken care not to be put to such an inconvenience again.

As regards duck-shooting, Holland carries the palm by a long way. An experienced shooter, even at the very beginning of the season, with an ordinary 12-bore gun, may bag a score of birds, which he will flush from the streams in his perambulations. And, as to flighting, the flocks are always considerable and very large, therefore quite first-class sport may be expected there in that line.

On the Zuyder Zee very good shooting is also to be had.

In Belgium the best marshes are those situated south-east of Neuport, near Ostend. The walking there is good, and sporting at times admirable. I have myself shot there, when tramping over the marshes, mixed bags of duck, teal, snipe, partridges, hares, quail, curlew, and plover, which could hardly have been surpassed anywhere. The ditches are not always "jumpable;" therefore leaping-poles must of necessity be carried by the attendants.

The only way of obtaining leave to shoot there is to apply direct to the mayors at the villages, and ask them for information as to what places one may shoot over, and so forth. They will commission the *gardes champêtre* to accompany the shooter, and no difficulty will be experienced if the shooter is inclined to be liberal, says so, and *proves it* from the first. On the other hand, if the new comer can procure letters of introduction to some of the authorities, it will smooth matters over still more, and he will find that if he has been warmly recommended, unlimited sport and country will be shown him. There are, moreover, several bits of free marshes quite open to every-

body. These the shooter could not discover by himself unless he resided some little time in the place, when of course eventually he would come to know every bit of land, and would therefore be enabled to separate the reserved ground from the free. But the best plan is undoubtedly to secure the services of the communal keepers. Two or three francs a day will make any of them extremely officious, and with one as a companion you are safe anywhere.

This feeling, I need not add, tends considerably to enliven the sport. One never shoots so well as when one knows he is entitled to shoot where he is. Confidence is everything in such matters. If you fancy you are trespassing, and if you imagine that every peasant that turns up in the distance is a keeper coming to pounce upon you, it is apt to make you feel fidgety, and you do not enjoy yourself. Some men, however, like that sort of thing. I know one who is never so glad as when he is crossing everybody's land, and sets the whole staff of keepers in chase after him. But then he has a long purse, and when caught does not mind "squaring" it handsomely, so all is for the best, and everybody is pleased; but it is not every shooter that can act thus, and moreover some owners are apt to resent such liberties, which it must be acknowledged are not altogether of a very sportsmanlike type.

The Belgian revenue is not rich, its inferior officers are very ill-paid, and, as a natural sequence, they are wonderfully sharp, and are always on the *qui vive*, and ready to pounce on anyone who is trying to evade paying. This being the case, let the sportsman first of all secure his shooting license, cost forty-two francs, say at the Ostend Revenue Office, where he may take the mail-cart or a trap and go on his way rejoicing, either to Neuport straight (by the former for two francs, I think), or he may stop at any

of the villages by the roadside, and stay at an inn and see about the shooting to be had. Probably some reticence will at first be shown, but silver will go a long way with people there, and the "almighty dollar" will be found perfectly omnipotent in Belgium.

I now come to France, and as its extent of northern coast is about fifteen times that of Belgium, the spots where one may shoot are a great deal more numerous, and will therefore need a more lengthened description.

The country about Dunkerque is flat, and quails, partridges, and hares are to be had in the fields and snipe in the ditches. There is, however, but little free shooting to be had there, and that little is overrun by shooters. Everybody owns a gun and a dog of some sort, and there is accordingly no game worth mentioning.

Below Calais several private marshes, strictly preserved, are to be found, and a visit to two or three of the leading sportsmen in Calais will insure *de facto* invitations which the Britisher always repays handsomely, either by some "jolly feeds" at one of the leading hotels or in some other equally acceptable way. Some of the Calais leading sportsmen are gentlemen in the real acceptation of the term, and I found those I met one and all most jolly companions and most entertaining fellows. They generally form a sort of company. Five or six share expenses and secure a good shooting-ground for their enjoyment and that of their friends; they get a good keeper, and get plenty of fun.

Half-way between Calais and Boulogne there are two or three small marshes where anyone may shoot. There is one such near Cape Griznez lighthouse; but as the Channel tunnel works have been begun just there, or thereabouts, presumably the workmen will not allow a single bird to settle unmolested.

The next free marsh and land is that of Slack. The marsh extends for miles along one shore of the river that gives it its name, and would be tolerably good were it not for the *huttiers*, who bother the fowl all night, and the vagabonds of the neighbouring villages who overrun the marsh early in the morning and late in the evening to pick up any stray birds. Many of these fellows have no sporting licenses, and it has always been a mystery to me why such a state of things was allowed. There is, however, a part of the marsh, viz. that next to the village of Slack, which is pretty fair. One may sport over the whole land and marsh as much as one likes by paying eight shillings for a shooting ticket at the inn. There are rabbits in the furzy downs and snipe along the stream, together with lapwing, plovers, curlews, ducks, &c.; and near by is the village of Ambleteuse, with its old harbour, where thousands of seafowl are wont to congregate in suitable weather.

At Boulogne the communal ground all round the town is free, and so is that at Wimereux. There are several nice streams at the latter village, and I would recommend particularly a small one that runs into the sea opposite an old fort. There are always a couple or two of snipe to be picked up there within two hundred yards of the shore, and the other streams are equally interesting.

On the other side of Boulogne runs the river Lianne, both shores of which are free for a mile or so. Past that distance the ground is preserved, and boards with *chasse réservée* will plainly tell the tale to all would-be trespassers.

Between Boulogne and Etaples there are several places justly renowned for their sporting capabilities. The marsh of Condette, one of these, is justly celebrated. That of Dannes ditto; but the latter is in the hands of a private gentleman, and the former is shot over now by several

actionnaires or bondholders. The actions are to be had for a few pounds, and they are well worth the money.

At Amiens there are two or three small marshes over which leave is readily obtained to sport.

In the neighbourhood of Etaples in winter time there is very fair wildfowl-shooting to be had free. The best plan there is to stop at one of the hotels and ask the landlord for information. He will either go with the sportsman, or send someone with him, or introduce him to some of the town sportsmen.

The next best spot will be on the river Somme, and in its immediate neighbourhood. The marshes of Abbeville used to be wonderfully good, and for ducks none could beat them.

From Abbeville to Saint Valery there is a good deal of sport to be had, and La Ferté, midway between the two towns, would probably prove the best spot to put up at.

Normandy I cannot speak about.

Brittany, however, for rough sport, is, perhaps, taken all in all, the best part of France. All along the coast in severe winter weather thousands upon thousands of wildfowl wend their way. In the woods woodcocks abound, and wild boar are to be found as well as wolves. In the fields partridges and hares are pretty numerous, and along the streams plenty of snipe are to be had, with a very fair sprinkling of ducks, teal, &c. Where to go is a pure matter of fancy. I could name twenty places where sportsmen might go and enjoy their fill of sport at an extremely moderate cost. The charge at an hotel for a good dinner rarely amounts to more than four shillings, a bottle of good wine included, and at some of the inferior places I daresay that sum would cover wholly one's board and lodging per diem. Many shootings are perfectly free, others merely

require asking for leave to sport over them, as a matter of form; and a good shot, with a good single-handed retrieving dog, either setter or spaniel, will do wonders there.

Referring to my shooting diary, I find that from Callac to Carhaix, walking along the river, I shot, in one day in September, seven couple and a half of snipe, three ducks, one teal, eight brace of partridges, and three hares, from 9 A.M. to 8 P.M. I had a keeper and his son to carry my ammunition and game, and I loaded them both with the latter. I worked two setters, and I can say with perfect truth that I never in all my life enjoyed myself better anywhere.

At Le Favirt, on another stream, I bagged twenty snipe in three hours in November the following year.

In fact, turn where you will and go where you like, a shooter is bound to meet with sport; and if the land and its inhabitants are now as they were when I went to Brittany, all I can say is no one need look for anything better, as regards free sport and comfort; and I can heartily recommend it to those of my readers who may be on the look-out for a spot where to go and spend a long or a short time with their guns and dogs. There is nothing better than Brittany anywhere on the Continent, for free sport, *cela s'entend*; for it stands to reason that where men spend small fortunes in stocking and preserving their manors, the said men are bound to have more birds to shoot than where no preservation is carried out; but it is not everybody who can spend a small fortune on sport, and therefore to sportsmen with short purses I will say unhesitatingly, go to Brittany. If, however, the distance be too great, then pick out any of those other spots nearer home which I have mentioned in this chapter, and I am convinced you will enjoy yourself there.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FREE SHOOTINGS ON THE CONTINENT—*Continued.*

AFTER the publication of the preceding article, I received, in the course of a few days, seven letters of inquiry, five of which were from England alone; and as the questions therein propounded might have also arisen in the minds of many other readers, I forthwith proceeded to give such explanations as the afore-mentioned inquiries might suggest.

"Are there no partridges and no hares in Holland?" wrote one of my correspondents; "you did not mention anything about them in your paper. At any rate, if there are any, of course they are too young to shoot yet" (this letter was written during the month of August, 1876), "and, if so, what could I shoot there *now?* and when does partridge-shooting begin over there?"

Now why I did not mention field-shooting as concerned Holland, was simply because a month at least must have elapsed then before shooters could enter into it. There are plenty of partridges and hares in Holland, but of course, as everywhere else, the sportsman must wait for the official opening of the field-shooting season before they can wage war against them. At the present time (August), one may only carry a gun and shoot along the streams, rivers, pools, or ditches. In short, one must shoot nothing but water

birds; and this state of things will last until September. To insure greater immunity to partridges, quails, and hares, the authorities profess to enforce the usual sporting regulations on the Continent—viz. that the shooters at no time (except when going to pick up a bird) must be more than ten metres (about twelve yards) from a sheet of water, either stagnant or running. When the shooter has to cross any intervening fields, he is, by a pleasant legal fiction, supposed to uncock his gun, and sling it over his back or carry it on his shoulder. This is very rarely attended to, unless rural police-officers are about, when it will behove the sportsman to look very sharp after such things. But, as a rule, nobody does attend to it, and I daresay more quails are bagged in August than in September, and probably not a few very young partridges are also shot by those who are temporarily in the district. I have seen quails, just landed from their long journeys, and therefore very poor and hardly able to fly, shot by some fellows, for the sake of saying that they had secured the first quail. I hope they enjoyed eating them, that is all; for surely they could not have enjoyed killing them.

As regards shooting partridges, it is not easy to follow in Holland the plan adopted in England towards furthering their being bagged; because, on account of the fields and meadows being small, and frequently intersected by ditches, it is the very deuce to follow a covey until one has succeeded in breaking it. Still, it may be done when one can quickly jump the ditches either with a run or with a pole. It may thus readily be inferred that not a little of the sportsman's success depends upon the cleverness of his pole-carriers. Most of these fellows, however, in years gone by, when shooting was more free and licenses were cheap, used to shoot; hence their taking in the case at a glance,

and acting accordingly. Others—the young ones, probably—never had the chance of handling a gun; but most likely they have been, season after season, employed to accompany some shooters, and thus they also have got into the knack. Anyhow, sportsmen will find that their pole-carriers, without exception, enter into the sport with a keenness and a relish quite on a par with their own, and that is a very great point. I have seen, scores of times, pole-bearers divesting themselves of their clothes, and swimming after dead birds when the pool was too large to allow of waiting until they drifted ashore; that is, of course, when no retrieving dogs were at hand. When remonstrated with they reply with determination: "The bird is dead, and it shall not be left behind to be wasted."

That is the proper sort of men to be accompanied by, and I can safely say that better game-bearers do not exist. The best of the fun is that they so thoroughly identify themselves with the sportsman who hires them, that they even quarrel and fight sometimes with their own countrymen if they say anything about you. But nowhere else will you find skill in the handling of firearms better appreciated than by these fellows. If you are a good shot they will stick to you as long as you remain in the district, even if you do not pay them as highly as they expected. But if you are a duffer, woe betide you; for, the men will not accompany you when once they have become convinced of the fact.

Hares in Holland are fairly numerous, and as a rule they are good swimmers and very fair water-jumpers.

To resume my answers to my first correspondent's inquiries, I may therefore say:

1st. There are both hares and partridges in fair abundance in Holland.

2ndly. You cannot shoot them in August. You must wait until September.

3rdly. If you go over to Holland in August, you will find rare sport at flappers, teal, snipe, curlews, waterhens, coots, and all the tribes of waders.

To this I would add that a tender-mouthed retrieving dog would be a desirable companion, but that he must be extremely well broken to stay at heel, and must retrieve well *across* water. Mind, not only *from* water, but *across* water; for it frequently happens that a bird falls amidst high grass or reeds on the other side of a stream, and the dog must, therefore, have a very good nose in order to find quickly, and, when once he has found, he must bring to hand straight, no matter how many ditches he may have to swim across or jump over.

Between you and me, reader, there are *very, very* few dogs that will do *that.*

Another correspondent said: "You mention a free (or about free) marsh and shooting at Slack, near Boulogne. Could you tell me the name of the innkeeper, if there is any? Does he take boarders? How far is the place from Boulogne? Any fishing? Is the village a large one?"

The name of the innkeeper at whose inn I myself stopped several times was Bouclet. He was a shooter himself, but he liked to show sport to those who went to his place. There is another inn opposite his, but his is the best; and he is better able to give every information, as he belongs to the municipality of the village. In fact, anyone staying at his house is sure not to be bothered, and if one secures the attendance of the rural keeper, at a fee of three or four francs a day (which will appear perfectly regal pay to the man), plenty of ground will be shown, and fair sport insured. Bouclet has no objection to boarders that I know

of. He is an honest, straightforward, elderly man, whom I can recommend. Slack is four or five miles from Boulogne. There is good sea-bathing at Ambleteuse, close by. In the river Slack I daresay some fishing might be had; but I never tried it. The village is very small, consisting of perhaps a score of houses. It is very quiet and very peaceful.

N.B.—Old Bouclet keeps very excellent old Bordeaux wine, and his daughter is a bit of rustic *cordon bleu.* Make a note of this.

The inn is very clean, and you can go in and out with your dogs as much as you like. Nobody finds fault with the mud they bring in, &c., and that is a great comfort. The terms are very moderate indeed. For six shillings per diem, a boarder would have the very best of everything, and if for a permanency, I daresay five shillings would be considered a remunerative price.

How to reach Boulogne is easy enough. Boats go straight from London Bridge, and take dogs, &c., without bother; or else one might go by train to Folkestone, then by steamer to Boulogne. This sea journey takes, in ordinary weather, little more than one hour and a half to perform.

From Boulogne to Slack there is no rail communication; but a fly is easily hired at no very great cost.

Besides the free shooting at Slack, Bouclet, being an influential sort of fellow, notwithstanding that he looks a very ordinary peasant, can procure to his customers any amount of shooting in the neighbourhood, and that is not to be despised, as game is well looked after all over that part of the country; and therefore very nice bags are to be made there.

My third correspondent wrote: "I have heard of roe-

bucks and wild boars being killed in Belgium. Is it free shooting? I would like to try my rifle there."

Yes, there are certainly a good many roebucks and wild boars killed annually in Belgium. Wild boars and roebucks, however, do not come to the north of Belgium. The country is too open for them there. Southwards, in the woods and forests which abound there, pretty fair sport is to be had; but I cannot say from experience that their shooting is free, as what I have had there myself was in preserved forests. There are, of course, parts of the land which are not preserved, and where both roebucks and wild boars may come occasionally, and may therefore be shot without anyone interfering with the shooter; but such an opportunity might occur but once or twice in a whole season, and therefore it could not be called either roebuck-shooting or boar-shooting. As a rule the forest owners or lessees hunt their woods and wait at the *sorties* for the bucks, or the boars, or the hares, which the hounds are sure to put up and to drive out. Very often many shooters congregate for a day's sport, and surround a wood, into which the hounds are uncoupled. In this manner one of the shooters, at any rate, is pretty sure to score, if he can hold his gun straight. When any such expeditions are being organised, a shooter can always, very readily, obtain leave to join the ranks of the "sporting detachment;" but it can hardly be considered sport, inasmuch as, generally, the two shooters between whom the game breaks covert fire at it, and for these two who have had the luck to fire, all the others have been kept waiting at their post for nothing, and that is not entertaining.

It is much better sport, if it can be obtained, to follow slow hounds—dachshunds for instance—and then cut to the spot where they are driving their quarry.

As to a rifle being used, of course it is occasionally done, but shot-guns are mostly employed. The right barrel is loaded with buckshot and the left with a bullet. Early in the season, sometimes one barrel contains ordinary No. 5 shot and the other buckshot; and this answers tolerably well with roebuck. In fact, I have seen roebuck killed outright at a forty or fifty yards' range with No. 6 shot. The first I shot myself was with No. 6, and I must say I was rather surprised at finding it knocked over so easily. Howbeit, it is much easier to shoot them with shot than with a bullet. There is no mistake about it; it takes a deuced clever shot to knock over a running roebuck with a rifle bullet. That it is done I do not doubt, but I have never seen an instance, though I have seen scores of bucks fired at with rifles. I have never tried it myself, feeling that I could not do it.

As regards wild boars, small shot and pepper would be about on a par as to killing power against them, for their tough hide is "a caution." Therefore nothing short of buckshot at short range, or a bullet if beyond that, will stop them as a very general rule. If, however, a boar breaks covert near you, when you did not expect one at all, and you are loaded with ordinary shot, that is no reason why you should not have a shy at him; but fire at his forelegs. If you succeed in breaking one, you will eventually secure the fellow, but you must be careful to load again quickly, approach him carefully, for fear of his charging into you, and despatch him as quickly as you can. Otherwise look out for squalls, for, when wounded, a boar is an ugly customer to deal with, and, if he can, he will commit murder with no compunction whatsoever. As to firing at him when his stern is turned towards you, it is perfectly useless, and a pure waste of ammunition. The Belgians say that "the stern of a boar is a shot-pouch;" and I believe it is, for it does not

seem to affect his vitality at all when he gets a few ounces there.

To sum up then, I must state that although there are, doubtless, free spots where one may occasionally shoot roe-bucks and wild boars, the opportunities for so doing in these free spots are so few and far between that *le jeu n'en vaut pas la chandelle—i.e.* it is not worth anyone's while going for it; but as leave may pretty well be obtained to assist *aux battues*, a residence in the south of Belgium is sure to produce, more or less, some sport at the big game.

The next inquiry is about Brittany. "To how much daily did your expenditure amount?"

About a sovereign per diem.

It is all very well to imagine that, because a shooting is free, its enjoyment may be had for nothing; but, practically, such an argument does not hold water. It is true that you have nothing to pay for the pleasure of going over the land; but there are, nevertheless, incidental expenses which, in the aggregate, make a not-to-be-overlooked amount. For instance, that memorable "opening-day" from Callac to Carhaix, which I mentioned in my last chapter, cost me not a farthing as concerned the privilege of going along the river and over the fields that border it; but I had, besides my own keep and my dogs' to defray, that of the keeper and of his son who accompanied me, showed me the pet places, and carried my game. That day, probably, cost me, all in all, thirty shillings; but then look at the sport! Look at the fun! Decidedly, had I been so disposed, I could have curtailed my expenses considerably, simply by going alone with my dogs and trying my luck. But could anybody imagine that I would have met with the sport I found? Certainly not. First of all, although I knew I could go along the river as much as I liked, and therefore

it would have made but little difference to my bag, as far as water-birds were concerned, whether I was accompanied or not, it would have proved widely different for my partridges, for I shot them all, or pretty nearly, in certain fields where my attendants led me purposely to look for them, and where they knew I could go.

Therefore, I say, my investments were a very judicious expenditure. Better spend thirty shillings or two pounds, or even more, and have your fill of fun, than go on a miserable ten-shilling piece, kill yourself with fagging, pass by the best shots, and make no bag worth mentioning. Mine, on that day, was mentioned all over the country, and I daresay to this very day the peasants will remember that fellow with his two setters who brought such a load of game as had not been heard of before. There was, though, an American artist who lived in a village close by, who ran me pretty close. He and his man were loaded, and I verily believe that if his share of the game-carrying process had not worn him out, he would have "licked" me, as he expressed it. As it was, he came to within five heads of my number, and great were our rejoicings at the hotel at Carhaix that night. He could hardly move the next day, partly from his fatigues of the previous day, and partly through having had "the sun so strong in the eyes," as Mr. Swiveller expressed it in his memorable explanation of a "rather tight" fit.

That the same sport under the same conditions may be had there now (or rather on the forthcoming anniversary of the day) I have not the slightest shadow of a doubt; that is with the proviso that the land is not now preserved. In my opinion this is not likely to be the case, because there are so many owners in that part of the world that they cannot agree by any manner of means. Hence

if some of them choose to preserve their ground, their immediate neighbours make it a rule not to, for the mere sake of aggravation; and as the land is so much cut up that no single landowner can effectually preserve a vast extent, why, the consequence is that a good deal, of a necessity, remains free to all comers. As a matter of course, after the first week or ten days are over game is much scarcer, and no one need trouble himself with an attendant then, unless as a matter of taste he prefers it, which many do, and quite right too, if they can afford it. Those who cannot, however, indulge in that luxury perambulate about with their game-bags over their own shoulders. It is pretty good fun too, and naturally expenses are thereby much reduced. So much for short purses. In fact, at any of the villages living is extremely cheap—wonderfully so.

By-the-way, if you wish people to be friendly to you, do not enter into religious or political controversies with them. Both would lead you into unexpected bother. I have known a shooter positively ordered away by the authorities for having expressed his sentiments somewhat too freely on the then state of Government affairs; and I have heard of another who was nearly beaten to death for deriding the Virgin or some saint. In fact, let the stranger strictly mind sport, and he will be all right. The rest is ticklish ground.

The remainder of the queries were about Belgium and its shore-shooting.

It is really astonishing to find that shore-shooting has taken such a hold on many sportsmen, when we consider that some years ago nobody seemed to pay any attention to it; or, at least, very few shooters cared for it, and those who did, kept it all to themselves. Nevertheless it is grand

sport, and its hardships, I verily believe, make it all the more palatable.

The accommodation on the Belgian coast is varied. One may spend ten pounds a day easily at the Hôtel de la Plage or at the Hôtel de l'Océan at Ostend. On the other hand, five shillings per diem, I daresay, would answer quite as well (and perhaps better) at one of the villages between Ostend and Blankenberg on one side, or between Ostend and Neuport on the other. Between ten pounds and five shillings there is a pretty wide margin, to which the shooter may accommodate himself according to his means.

My opinion, if asked, would be this: Any lengthened stay at the villages will be totally unbearable, unless the shooter has some work or favourite amusement to which he may turn when occasion requires. An artist or a literary man might get on very well, but a man who would have nothing to turn to would soon get tired of it, as there is positively no society and no entertainment of any kind to be had. Take Mariakerque, for instance, as a sample of what to expect. I know a fellow who, in his first fit of enthusiasm, voted a stay in that hole a perfectly glorious treat. I laughed, and let him try. He stayed three days, came back to Ostend, and called Mariakerque all the names he could think of. Therefore I contend that stopping at Ostend or at Neuport—but the former preferred, if for a long stay—will be the best plan to adopt.

As to the sport, it is simply glorious. I have never seen anything like the numbers of birds that are occasionally to be seen on the sea-shore, and some of my best days have been spent there. The fact of the matter is, there is hardly any local shooting. The majority of the villagers have no guns; those few who have cannot afford to buy

powder and shot; and if one or two have both guns and ammunition, they prefer keeping them for potting a hare or a partridge to firing it at sea-fowl. This explains how it is that birds are so easily reached; being undisturbed, they are not so wild as they are apt to be in other spots where they are much pursued. As regards their great numbers, this is very easily accounted for. At low tide the sands are wide, and afford excellent feeding to the hungry birds; hence their congregating so readily. In fact, the place seems to be quite a place of rendezvous at certain epochs; and the most remarkable amongst these is certainly what the inhabitants call *le passage d'été—i.e.* the summer passage. This takes place early in August generally, and it is a most extraordinary sight. All the young broods settle on the sands, and for several days there is a continual passing southwards of flocks upon flocks. The shore-waders can then certainly be roughly reckoned by millions. When I state that I saw five miles of the sands past Mariakerque so covered with birds that I fired two hundred shots as fast as I could load, and only gave up then because I had no more ammunition ready, an estimate can be formed of the thickness and persistency of the flocks. They passed almost undeviatingly, and every shot ought to have told had I bided my time, but of course I tried, in my enthusiasm, both long and short ranges. At any rate, I never made so great a bag anywhere else, either before or since. When we came back to Ostend not only my man was covered with birds, but I would not care again for another such load as I had to carry. For three days the passage lasted. The sea was black with ducks, and the shore was covered with curlews, plovers, sandpipers, oxbirds, and oyster-catchers.

The quickest way to reach Ostend is *viâ* Dover, per mail steamers, the fastest in the Channel. Many times during my rambles on the shore in stormy weather have I watched them literally cutting their way through the heavy waves of the German Ocean.

The cheapest method, however, to get to Ostend is per steamer from London direct. To those who are not apt to be sea-sick the trip is very enjoyable.

The same may be said of the journey from Southampton to St. Malo for those sportsmen who wish to visit Brittany. From St. Malo one may go by rail in all directions.

As to St. Valery, there is no quicker way of reaching it than *viâ* Boulogne or Calais; *viâ* Rouen per steamer from Southampton it takes longer, on account of the sea-journey. The sport on the river Somme is carried on from flat-bottomed punts, which are shoved along by the boatmen. There used to be very good sport on that river, and the flighting was particularly good. However, the favourite process then consisted in drifting down the river at dawn of day until broad daylight. Amongst the reeds one had always ducks flushed right and left, sometimes by twos and threes, and sometimes in companies. I never saw flocks there, except once in very hard weather. The birds in ordinary weather were too much disturbed to congregate in large numbers.

Well, I have now given all the hints that were asked me, and I trust the information I have given will be found both comprehensive and acceptable.

There is not the slightest doubt that, for a man without encumbrance, there can be few things more entertaining than a sporting-trip on the Continent, for he may go here

and there, and cull the sweets of every place, without any extraordinary expenditure, and with the novelty of queer customs, and costumes, and manners, continually before his eyes. If this is not enjoyment, I should like to know what is.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DUCK-DECOYING IN FRANCE.

THE French ignore entirely the art of decoying ducks *into snares*. All the ducks brought by the fowlers to market *have been shot*. Those who make it their business to shoot wildfowl in France almost invariably employ live decoy-ducks to attract the wild ones, and the sport is only carried on at night.

When ducks are abundant the sport is very interesting —not as far as the shooting of the game is concerned, for there is not much skill required, the gun being brought to bear point-blank on the birds when they are settled within range; but it is nevertheless vastly amusing to watch the fowlers and the wildfowl.

This is how the French proceed: They choose in the marshes a dry spot near some *open* water (*i.e.* cleared of weeds), and on that spot they build a hut; if there is no dry spot at hand they set to work with spades, and soon make a mound of earth sufficiently large for the hut, and a foot or two above the level of the water, so that the hut may be kept as dry as possible. The construction of the hut itself, in most cases, is of an extraordinary simplicity. A dozen or so of strong willow branches are stuck into the ground, then bent again till the other ends reach also the

ground, when they too are stuck, thus forming a sort of tunnel. This framework is then covered over with straw, and perhaps turf, to prevent its being carried away altogether by some strong wind; but if the place be at all sheltered the turf is dispensed with, and the straw alone covers the devoted sportsmen's heads. A few huts, however, being permanently erected, are built more substantially: the sides are made of brick, securely cemented, and the top is covered with a thick strong thatch, which keeps out effectually rain, snow, and wind; the interior is also profusely supplied with straw; and what with this warm abode, their rugs, their great coats, and their pocket-pistols, the sportsmen are far from being unpleasantly situated, as far as bodily comforts are concerned. The only drawback to the fun is that you must neither smoke, nor move, nor talk beyond an occasional whisper, when waiting for the birds, and sometimes you have to wait a long time. The pool facing the hut must not be more than forty yards square in extent. The reason for this is obvious. Were it larger the birds might settle on the water out of range altogether; or, if of a dark night, they might be out of sight although not virtually out of range. If the sheet of water be naturally too large, a small mud wall is erected, enclosing the dimensions given, and an outlet is arranged for the rest of the water, so that it cannot interfere with the sport by affording to the wildfowl a place of resort inaccessible to the gun. Well, then, both the pool and the hut being ready, and the game being reported to be *on the passage*, as it is called (*i.e.* many flights having been seen about), the fowler resorts to his hut, with his ducks (generally three in number, a drake and two ducks) under his arms, in a basket, or in his game-bag. Arrived at his destination, he places the ducks, at about ten yards from his hut, on the water; and, to prevent

them from going ashore or removing themselves altogether, he fastens them by the legs to a stone, with a string a yard or so in length. Some fasten only the drake. As for the ducks, a long string, whose end remains in the hut, is tied to one of their legs. This mode of proceeding is by far the best plan, for the fowler has more command over his decoys; and if the wild ducks are flighty and don't seem to care about settling, he can get up a little domestic broil amongst his own ducks to attract the wild ones' attention. This is how he proceeds: He draws steadily the two ducks to him. The drake, naturally enough, wants to follow them, but he cannot, being secured to a stone; so he is immediately in the sorest distress. He fancies that he is being deserted by his wives; he thinks that they are unfaithful to him; and imagining, no doubt, all sorts of dreadful things, he sets up an outcry and vents his indignation in no measured terms. This the wild ducks hear and listen to. The fowler then lets his ducks go back again; and the drake testifies then, according to his fashion, his unbounded thankfulness at having recovered them. Now all this noise, being quite natural, entices the fowl quite readily. They hear the old fellow and his mates quacking alternately their anxiety and joy, in a language which they perfectly understand; and as they are not shamming, but playing their part in thorough earnest, no wonder that their rendering of the character is good; so down come the wild birds to see what it is all about. The fowler then shoots as many as he can, picks them up, reloads, and begins again.

It is astonishing how readily birds will forget both noise and danger, and come again quickly, especially if the weather is at all rough. I have seen forty ducks shot thus in one night by two men, and rare good fun it was too.

Now many of our sportsmen who live along the coast might, with advantage and pleasure, try what fun a hut in this style would afford them. Properly managed, just as I have described it, success is inevitable.

The hut and pool of water must be in an open place, so as to be easily seen by the birds when on the wing.

To those sportsmen who have no live decoy-ducks, and who do not care to keep any, a *duck-call* and two or three indiarubber decoys will answer the purpose to some extent, but, of course, not so well as live ducks would; there are notes in nature which no instrument can imitate. If, however, the wildfowl are in numbers, you may be pretty sure of securing your share. Indiarubber decoy-ducks have also an advantage over the live ones—viz. you need not be afraid of shooting them; and many decoy-ducks are shot every season, by glancing shots, or through their getting accidentally, some dark night, mixed up with the wild ones.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SHOOTING IN FRANCE.

FRENCH sportsmen are particularly jealous and irascible; the best friends will occasionally quarrel over a head of game. I have seen two brothers nearly coming to blows on account of one of them accidentally frightening away some wildfowl, and I have seen repeatedly two French sportsmen quarrelling in the field over a quail or a partridge which both had shot at. The greatest source of quarrels, however, is derived from hare-shooting, on account of hares carrying shot better than feathered game. For instance, who that has shot in France has not seen the following case happen before him when out with French sportsmen? A hare bolts, one of the gunners fires at puss, hits her, but she manages still to run, when another sportsman, necessarily farther from the hare than the first shooter, fires at her also, and then, according to the French rule, claims her as his.

There was a man who often played me that trick, but I was once one too many for him, and it cured him—for a wonder! This man (a wealthy farmer, by-the-way) was the greatest duffer it has ever been my lot to fall in with. He never could hit anything, whatever it was—whether it rose or started close to him or far from him, it did not

matter ; he missed invariably, of course, with the usual excuses, that his shot had balled, &c. &c. He found out by experience that I had a knack of placing myself at the likeliest places, and that I fired oftener than others on that account (for there is a knack in finding the best corners), and also that I generally managed to riddle my game more or less ; so he always posted himself in my neighbourhood, and whenever I fired he fired also, and then, of course, I had to waive my claim on the game. He did me three times, but the fourth he "caught a Tartar." Having fully determined to give him a lesson, I put two friends in my confidence, and we managed to take away the two cartridges that were in his gun, and to substitute in their stead two blank ones. This was during luncheon. Presently the meal ended, and we all rose and directed our steps towards a wood celebrated for hares, where I generally got a shot. I placed myself in my usual corner, and, behold ! my man took his stand about sixty yards from me. So far nothing could be better. I could hardly keep from laughing ; as for the two friends of mine who were in the secret, they fairly puffed fit to kill themselves.

"What is the matter with them ?" asked he of the blank cartridges.

"I don't know," I shouted back. "But we had better stop talking, especially in such a high key, or our chance of sport will be decidedly remote."

"All right," he said.

Presently, we heard the keepers whistle on the other side of the wood. That meant that the hounds were being uncoupled. We listened intently, for, very often, the hares broke covert before the hounds were fairly on their track. So there I was watching our border, Mr. Blank-Cartridges watching me. All was silent, beyond the babbling of the

hounds, who were hunting but slowly. Suddenly one opened. It was a bitch of mine named "Juno," who never told a falsehood, and presently the whole of our little pack were in full cry. They seemed to go away from us, and Mr. Blank-C. indicated as much to me by signs of utter despair. Just as he was thus engaged telegraphing to me, a fine hare broke covert ten yards from me, and stopped to listen to the (to her) not very agreeable music that was going on. There she was, half raised on her hind legs, her head turned away from me. For a second she stood thus, then her big brown eye caught sight of me, and she bolted. Mr. Blank-C., who had seen me, although he could not, from the nature of the ground, see the hare, had guessed pretty accurately what had been thus riveting my attention, and he stood ready, confronting me, so that the moment I fired, bowling over the hare, he also pulled trigger. I allowed him to run and pick up the hare; and then, as the dogs had come out of the wood, my friends, I, and the other sportsmen drew round him, as usual in such cases, to examine the hare, to compliment the shooter, &c. &c. Mr. Blank-C. was complacently holding "puss" by the hind legs.

"You fired too low," he said to me in a patronising way.

"Indeed?" said I.

"Yes," he said, "I saw your shot strike the ground about a yard from the hare."

"But," I said, "the hare seems wounded on my side."

"Oh! but she turned when I fired, don't you remember?" he answered hastily, colouring somewhat.

"No; I don't remember that incident," I said.

The other sportsmen looked at each other in wonder, whilst I was fairly convulsed with laughter, and so were my friends.

"Well, gentlemen, what are you laughing at?" asked one of the party.

I turned then to Mr. Blank-Cartridges: "I hope you will excuse the liberty we have taken with your gun," I said, "but we only intended it for a joke."

"A joke! excuse the liberty! what do you mean?" said the culprit.

"Well," I said, "the fact is, it is materially impossible that you should have shot this hare."

"And why not, pray?"

"Because you had no shot in your gun."

"What!"

"Open the breech," I said; "you have fired but one cartridge; look at the one left in it."

He did so.

"A blank cartridge, by all that is wonderful!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," I said, "we placed a couple of such in your gun. Are you convinced now that you did not shoot the hare?"

He was confounded, and looked very foolish for a minute or so; then with the buoyancy of spirits peculiar to his countrymen, he said, "Ah! that's a very good trick!"

Nevertheless, he did not like it. He never claimed any more hares from me after that.

Now this gives an instance of the rapacity (alas! too common) amongst French sportsmen. Their jealousy is proverbial. I had a French friend, a worthy fellow in every other respect, but the most abominable companion one could find for a day's shooting. If you happened to fall in with game and he did not, he was very disagreeable directly. I now bring to mind an occasion on which he showed his irritability in rather a queer way. First of all, let me premise that he was really a very good shot, and that he

would have scrupled, under ordinary circumstances, to kill a hare in her form.

Well, on that memorable day, somehow I had been more lucky than he, and accordingly he was "riled," nicely riled; but Frenchmen are always polite, though wrathful at heart. We were coming home to dinner, and were crossing a field adjoining the house. As we had beaten the said field before, we did not think it worth while to beat it again (very foolish this, by-the-way), so we were then walking and talking together, when suddenly he fired about ten yards ahead on the ground, and, to my utter disgust and astonishment, he picked up a hare which he had murdered in her form.

"There," he said, "I have got one too!" This with a triumphant gleam of joy in his eyes.

"I did not know you were so anxious to have a hare," I said, "else I would have willingly given you one."

"Oh!" he said, "there is nothing like one killed by one's own gun!"

"That is true," I answered; "but then it ought to be killed in a sportsmanlike manner, otherwise there is no merit in it."

"That is right enough," he replied.

"Then why did you not let her bolt, and then shoot her? That is the way to do it; and, I think, the way you always did it before."

"Oh yes," he exclaimed; "I daresay if I had bolted her—you shoot quicker than I do—you would have bundled her. *Pas si bête.*"

"So that it was for fear that I should shoot her that you——"

"Exactly so," he said coolly.

Now what could I say to that? Here was a case of

jealousy carried to a very unsportsmanlike extent. Don't think that these are isolated instances; they are of everyday occurrence.

If you meet a party of French shooters after a day's sport, you will find that almost each of them privately has to grumble against the others; it is most amusing to hear them.

Now some sportsmen of the old school are quite the reverse of this; they are so polite that they are positively distressing. Once I was shooting with the Baron de M——, who is about as fair a specimen of the French *gentilhomme* as could be found in the country. We entered covert together, as per agreement, and soon found game. A beater on the baron's side sprang a pheasant. It rose beautifully before him, so I simply looked at the bird, expecting my host to knock it over. Not hearing the detonation I looked at him: he was looking at me.

"*Pourquoi, monsieur, n'a t-il pas tiré?*" he said to me, with the most elaborate bow.

I explained to him that the pheasant rose on his side, and we considered it in England ungentlemanly to shoot across a companion, hence my abstention.

"Ah!" he said, "the English are a very well-bred nation."

"But," I said, "may I ask why *you* did not fire?"

"I fire before my guest?—never! You first!"

"Now, look here, baron," I said, "if we are so polite we won't do any good. Let us knock over whatever we can, and never mind who fires first!"

Had I not spoken thus, it was evident that my too-polite host would have let me shoot alone.

There are few men of his stamp left in France now, I warrant you—*mais revenons à nos chasseurs.*

The French are proverbially a lively people, and French sportsmen can boast of a fair sprinkle of the lively class amongst their ranks. I have known some French fellows that it was perfectly impossible to go shooting with, at least if they were near you, on account of their irrepressible love of fun, punning, and talking. I knew one who had always a flute in his game-bag. He used to strut about in the fields with us, his gun slung on his back, according to the French fashion, and he favoured us all day through with snatches of all sorts of tunes and songs. Of course he never shot anything, leastways I never saw him even fire. He was, without contradiction, the most amusing individual I ever met with; but I am afraid his efforts to amuse us were but poorly rewarded by the curses of the enraged sportsmen whose game he disturbed by his melody. One day we were in a wood, a woodcock rose, and two of us missed it. We were terribly mad, of course; but who could have refrained from laughing, when, to an inquiry made by our musician, fifty yards off, and consequently invisible, whether we had hit or not, and receiving for answer our curses, loud and deep, we heard the tune of the celebrated French song, "*J'ai du bon tabac dans ma tabatière*," coming from his flute, in a most lively strain, to soothe our wounded feelings.

"That fellow will drive me crazy," said my neighbour in English.

In answer to which the flute stopped, then started again to the tune of "Better days are coming."

One day, though, our musician fairly dropped his music. He was regaling himself with some tunes, as usual, when a hare started nearly under his feet. He was so shaken that it almost made him ill.

When I said that I never saw him shoot I was mis-

taken. I saw him shooting twice on the same day, under the following circumstances: Some of our English fellows, with whom he was an immense favourite, resolved to play him an innocent trick. They placed a stuffed hare's skin in a furrow, and made him shoot at it. At first he declined, like a sensible fellow.

"I shall miss her if she starts," he said, for of course he was fully convinced that it was a live hare.

"Well, then, shoot it in its form," said our young scamps.

"I should not like to. It looks like murder!"

"Never mind; for once it does not matter. Go on; fire away! Mind you go on tip-toe, otherwise she will bolt!"

They crammed him with advice, counsels, and recommendations, and finally persuaded him to try. He fired, and you may well imagine the laughter that greeted the explosion. He took the joke in good part though, and, drawing his flute out of his pockct, "Serve me right," said he; "everybody to his trade, and music is my forte." Nevertheless, two hours after, he was taken in once more, in a very clever way. The same stuffed hare was disposed and arranged in some furze that time. One of the confederates was suddenly discovered aiming at it, and pretending to be trying to fire; but somehow his gun would not go off (and for a very good reason, too, considering that he had taken care to remove the cartridges). Another confederate, who had remained purposely near the musician, then drew his attention towards their friend.

"Hallo!" he said, "what is up? Oh! here is a lark! James sees a hare or a rabbit, and his gun won't go off. If I were you I would run and shoot it; that would be your best revenge for his practical joke on you this morning."

As soon said it was done. The musician ran, to James's pretended mortification, blazed away both barrels, and found, after all, that he had been done once more.

Another class of sportsmen, far more numerous than the musical ones, and less interesting, are the tipplers. This class, in France, increases every year. Have they shot a rabbit, they must have a drop, and must have you to drink one also; that is the worst. If you decline they think that you are stuck-up, and that you despise them; if you accept, you soon get muddled, for after every shot you must take a drop. If it rain, they say it will prevent you from getting rheumatism; if it is cold, it will keep you warm; if it is warm, it will keep you cool; if you have missed a fair shot, it will console you; and if you succeed, it will be your reward; in one word, whether it be fine or not, whether you shoot well or not, the tippling sportsman will drink *une goutte*, and will be cross if you don't. Bad plan, this—very bad plan—and a dangerous one, too, for men who are handling firearms.

The French country sportsmen, as a rule, care little for sporting dresses. Those shooters you see dressed out, and sporting continually English gaiters and cartridge-belts, are, as a rule, but town amateurs, who wish to impress the public with their cleverness in their favourite pursuit. The real sportsmen disdain making a show, but generally take good care of themselves in every other respect. It is not long since that I met a *chasseur* one very cold winter morning, with a lady's muff hanging from his neck by a string; and he knew how to use it, too, and no mistake. I can't say that he did much execution in the field, but none the less he looked vastly amusing. Nor is this the only instance on record. Some friends of mine who reside in France at a favourite watering-place, tell me that their town can also

boast of a muff-carrying sportsman, and that the said sportsman may be seen almost any day in winter with that useful appendage.

Generally speaking, a day's shooting with French gentlemen is most entertaining. They are always very amiable, pleasant, and chatty, except when positively annoyed, and their witty remarks and jolly humour have always to me been a source of envy. When a bird is shot the most extraordinary remarks are passed, such as, "This bird shall not die of small-pox," &c. &c. Let us also say that the educated classes in France are a jolly set of men, not to be in any case assimilated with the rustics. The latter are the most atrocious beings one may have to deal with. They will *let you* their shooting, for instance, and *poach*, or encourage their men to poach; they cannot even stand seeing you enjoying yourself on their ground, though you pay them for the privilege. That is strange, but it is true. Their dislike is not confined to foreigners. The French peasant hates everyone who is not a peasant, and mistrusts even his own kin sometimes, so that whether you be French or English does not much signify. Note that the peasant has no objection whatever to let his ground to anyone, not the least; he pockets your money readily enough, and does not much trouble himself to know any more; but, this part of the bargain being satisfactorily concluded, he straightway begins to feel that it is a pity that such fine hares and rabbits should be killed and eaten by a stranger. From this, to taking a gun (unless he be well looked after), the distance is not great; but should he be prevented from doing any harm, he thinks himself an ill-used man, and cannot help cursing you *sotto voce* when he sees you beating his fields.

Their untrustworthiness is known by their countrymen

of course, far better than by us birds of passage. Whenever I was with some French sportsmen and we happened to meet a peasant, "Let us ask him which way the partridges are," they used to tell me, "he is sure to tell us just the reverse; so that by going in the direction opposite to that which he will point out to us we are pretty sure to fall in with the game" (which, by-the-way, was invariably the case).

"But," I used to say, "why do they always try thus to mislead you?"

"Ah!" they would answer me, "*le paysan n'aime pas qu'on tue son gibier.*"

"But it is no longer his, since you pay him for the right of killing it."

"True; but nevertheless he is mad to see us shoot it!"

Now did you ever hear of such ill-favoured dogs?

This dislike of the peasants for gentlemen leads to frequent quarrels, and sometimes to ugly scenes. It has been my lot to be witness of such an adventure once, and I am not likely to forget it in a hurry, as it very nearly cost a man's life. I was out with a Yorkshireman, a friend of mine, a very nice fellow, but not endowed with an incalculable amount of patience, when, somehow or other, we got into a quarrel with three French ploughmen at work in a field. They abused us in the most disgusting manner, knowing well enough that men who have firearms in their hands need keep their tempers, lest they should illuse them. We paid no attention to them, which made them still more wild, and then they threw a stone at us. This was the straw that broke the camel's back.

"Here," said my friend to me, "hold my gun a couple of minutes."

"What are you going to do?"

Before I could prevent him he sprang over the hedge, planted his fist in one of the men's faces, and sent him flying head over heels under his horse's feet. The man got up with mischief in his eyes, and called out to his companions to come to the rescue. But I was on the scene of action then, and presenting my gun to the other fellows, "If one of you stirs a step he is a dead man," I said. Whilst thus speaking, and my back necessarily turned towards my friend, I heard a tremendous crash, followed by a dreadful groan and a fall. "I think he has got more than he bargained for," said my chum. I turned round; the man was insensible, with an ugly flow of blood from the mouth, nose, and ears. We did all we could; but it was a long time before he came round, and I was all the while advising and urging my friend to bolt to England before the affair was known, for I knew that, although, of course, if brought before a court, he would have been eventually acquitted, the detention in a prison till the case had been fully investigated and tried would have been anything but pleasant for him. However, all is well that ends well. The fellow's hiding did him good; he was in bed for a week or so, and, when he got up, he swore he would never interfere any more with any sportsmen, whoever they might be. In fact, it was most pleasing to meet him ever after. By the rule of progression we might safely conclude that, if all other bad-tempered fellows were to get a beating apiece, sporting in France would be far more pleasurable than it is.

"*Tel pays, telles mœurs*," says the French; and to no nation is the saying more applicable than to their own, for they are a peculiar race, and their ways are vastly amusing, particularly in what relates to shooting. The French, as a rule, are a very gun-loving set of men. Few there are amongst

them who are without a gun, especially if they live in the country, and, in justice, I may say few of them know how to use their weapons with fair accuracy. I have seen but very few Frenchmen—and I have mixed with a great many of them—who were clever shots. To two causes I attribute their perpetual missing: the first is the want of powder behind their shot, and the second the shooter's invariable trepidation and precipitation. I never knew one to keep quite cool when his dogs were on point. One would think, by the way they behave under such circumstances, that *they* were going to be shot. As for the powder question, the French are almost invariably very sparing in its doses. Whether it is that it is a dear commodity, and is, therefore, to be economised, or that their guns could not stand the charges of powder one is accustomed to use in Great Britain, I cannot tell; perhaps both reasons influence them; or, perhaps, they have more confidence in a large quantity of shot in proportion to the powder. If such be the case, experience ought, by this time, to have taught them better.

Whatever may be their motives, there is the fact, and the consequence is that it is rare to see a bird properly bundled in France when more than thirty yards away from the gun. As for the hares, they run away with half-a-dozen barrels fired at them at that distance. This explains the invariable expressions of astonishment which greet the performances of British sportsmen when in the field with their French *confrères*; and well they may be astonished, for a greater contrast is rarely to be met with. In everything they differ—in dress, in accoutrements, in arms, in dogs, in style, and in execution.

Shall I give an outline of such a performance? Well, then, at quail and partridge shooting, for instance, you will

find that the French give themselves an immense amount of unnecessary trouble. There they are, finger on trigger, ready to fire at a second's notice, following their dogs wherever they go in a regular "stew," trembling lest the game should rise out of range, jabbering away to their dogs, shying stones and clods of earth at them, ordering them to go ahead, and then calling them back to heel immediately they get ten yards away, lest they should flush the birds. The Englishman, on the contrary, goes methodically to work, and trusts entirely to his dog or dogs. This, in some cases, happens to be a mistake; but at any rate the sportsman is far more dignified and cool in his bearing, and, in the end, can boast of a much better bag after the day's sport.

There is, however, one thing which cannot escape notice the very first time one shoots in company with French sportsmen, and that is their dogs. There is no medium class of animals with them; they are either good or bad, broken or unbroken, eminently useful or worse than useless. The latter form the more numerous class, of course. As for the good ones, they are pre-eminently useful, and it is astonishing what they can do. The French have no retrievers proper; all their pointers, setters, and spaniels are trained to retrieve, and this accomplishment is often the best part of their education. Some of their dogs are truly invaluable, and, what is greatly in their favour, they are within reach of most purses. The man in moderate circumstances in England cannot pretend to procure the dogs which fashion of late decides to be indispensable in aristocratic shooting-circles, viz. the dropping setters, pointers, or spaniels, and the retriever proper, to fetch the game when shot. Two such setters or pointers are worth at least £40; and a retriever,

broken to remain at heel under all circumstances, tender-mouthed, good-tempered, and *black* (in fashionable shooting circles no other colour is admitted)—such a dog, I say, is worth at least £20; so that a man of any pretension must pay away £60, and feed and work three dogs; and then, when the partridge or grouse season is at an end, the pointers and setters are put aside, being useless, and two spaniels, or more, must be got to work covert, furze, marshes, &c. For those whose purses are plentifully supplied, it is all very well; it brings into notice a pleasing variety of animals, and is a *very good thing* for dog breeders and breakers. So far it is all perfection, but to ardent sportsmen possessing only moderate means, it is perfectly impossible to procure such allies for field-work. What, then, are they to do? They must procure some retrieving dog, good at all game, and be satisfied therewith. That is precisely what the French do, and, as I said before, their dogs are not dear. I have bought some myself at different times, pointers and setters, perfectly broken to retrieve tenderly, at prices varying, according to the time of the year, the age of the animal, his style of working, his appearance, &c., from £12 to £18. I don't consider this dear at all. The man who breeds and breaks the dog cannot possibly find it very remunerative. The dog may die of distemper or disease, or meet with an accident, or turn out a worthless dog from many causes. At any rate, the breaker has to put him through all the phases of his education; take him into the fields, show him game, and keep him altogether a couple of years at least; so that, taking everything into consideration, £15, or thereabouts, is a moderate price. There is one thing, however, to be said against the dogs—they are not broken to *drop* to shot at all; the moment you fire they run in. I often won-

dered why the breakers did not see about that. I asked one.

"Well," he said, "you see, our sportsmen" (meaning the French) "don't care a pin about such an accomplishment—in fact, I have never heard of it myself. They like their dogs to secure the game the moment it reaches the ground (if a bird), or is stopped in his run (if a hare or a rabbit)."

"But," I objected, "supposing you had only wounded a hare."

"Well," he retorted, "in that case the dog will catch it, and bring it to hand."

"Yes, but this is an enticement for the dogs to 'chase fur' even when *not* fired at."

"Some do," he said, "I daresay; but then there are good dogs and bad dogs. Our *good* dogs don't chase unless you have fired; but as to teaching them to drop to shot, why, were I to have such a dog, I could not sell it. Our sportsmen would not buy him. They would say, 'Here is a fool of a dog! When I have shot and wounded a hare or rabbit, he stops short and lets them run away; and in the case of a rabbit, gives it time to regain its burrow and disappear.'"

There was some truth in that remark, and it was in vain that I argued with the man that, in the event of your having missed *clean*, it was most annoying to have your dog chasing a hare, for instance, for a mile or so, and disturbing all the game in the fields in the immediate vicinity of the sportsmen. He shrugged his shoulders and said, with a grin, that "there was not any game at all, perhaps, and therefore it could not do much harm if the fields were scampered over."

And now as to the breeds. I must say that it is a great

pity that the French allow their dogs to run at large when not actually wanted in the field. The consequence of such an irrational proceeding is that the different breeds of dogs mix freely together, and evidently, at no very great period from the present time, if such a course be persevered in, it will be a difficult matter in France to procure a thoroughbred pointer or setter. Too much care cannot be taken to prevent such a mishap; and yet, as I have just said, you may see any day setter bitches or pointer bitches, all the year round, wandering about in the streets of the villages or country towns.

There are, however, some very fine dogs in France, and, when well broken, they are truly valuable animals. From having been made constant companions of their breaker, who is a thorough sportsman as a matter of course, the dogs get thoroughly accustomed to all sorts of game, and it is not a slight advantage to their future owners.

I have seen French setters and pointers used right through the season for all sorts of game—quails, partridges, rabbits, hares, pheasants, snipe, duck, woodcock, seafowl, &c. &c.—in fact, nothing comes amiss to them. I have seen some who stood perfectly on point at any game, but who would beat a wood equal to a beagle when told, and as to their retrieving qualities, they were perfection. These dogs belonged invariably to the enthusiastic French sportsmen.

There exists in France a class of men we have not on this side of the water—I mean the professional sportsmen, men who live by the sale of their spoils. Of course this is only possible in a country where the land is not wholly preserved. In the British Islands, barring wildfowl, there is no sport carried on as a trade by professional shooters; and, by-the-way, there is about this a very curious anomaly. In

those places in the British kingdom where wildfowl love to congregate, these birds are almost exclusively shot by professionals; and what is more startling is that those men look upon gentlemen sportsmen as perfect intruders, who have no right whatever to shoot at all at *their* game. They have been allowed for so many years to carry on their vocation with their punts and swivel-guns, that they have come to consider the sport their own property, and they resent savagely any intrusion, however slight.

Now, in point of sport, I contend that swivel-guns, used professionally, are disastrous in their effects, inasmuch as the game is destroyed in immense numbers for the benefit of a few men, whilst it might have led, with the legitimate shoulder-guns, or now and then with a swivel, to endless sport to the community of sportsmen in general. And that the professional fowlers should be allowed to molest, disturb, or even frighten a casual gentleman sportsman, who may happen to be in their vicinity and decline mixing with them, and standing drink to the whole congregation, is a thing that shames our system of things. That such is the case I have not the slightest shadow of a doubt; not that I have ever experienced it myself, but I have heard from reliable friends that such has been the treatment they experienced at the hands of some fowlers—their sport had been interfered with, and shots even were occasionally directed towards them. When such acts were complained of, the fowlers retorted with great glee, "What business had gentlemen to be there at all!"

Now such a state of things ought not to be allowed, and certainly would not be tolerated in France—there is not the slightest doubt about that.

And now, after this little digression, *revenons à nos moutons—i.e.* to the French professional sportsmen. They

are, of course, what we should term an enthusiastic body of men—what the French call *enragés chasseurs*. They are at it from the opening of the season to the very last day, from dawn to sunset, and manage to gather a very pretty living in their favourite pursuit. Do not misunderstand me. By a fair living, I mean, of course, for France, where a man may live for a couple of shillings a day very comfortably. As a rule, these men undertake also the breaking of dogs, either on their own account or for some of their richer brethren in St. Hubert. Their terms vary from £2 to £4 or £5. For that amount they will work a dog, and teach him his business during a whole season. Some of them work on the principle of "No good result, no pay;" that is to say, they agree that if the dog at the end of a given time is not up to the requisite mark, the owner can take up his dog without paying the breaker a farthing. But this is a bad plan, because, if the game is abundant, the breaker will rather secure the game for his own *immediate* disposal than pay all attention to the dog in the hope of a *remote* retribution. The dog, on the contrary, will have all the man's care bestowed on his education, if the terms are good and the pay certain, therefore it is much better to adopt the plan of making a decided bargain, and fixing your terms. In the event of the breaker being unable to train the dog, he will return it to you after a very short trial, if he thinks it is not worth his while to give him his time and attention; but, generally speaking, they are very clever and painstaking men, and, as they pride themselves on their pupils' training, they generally fulfil their bargains with great credit.

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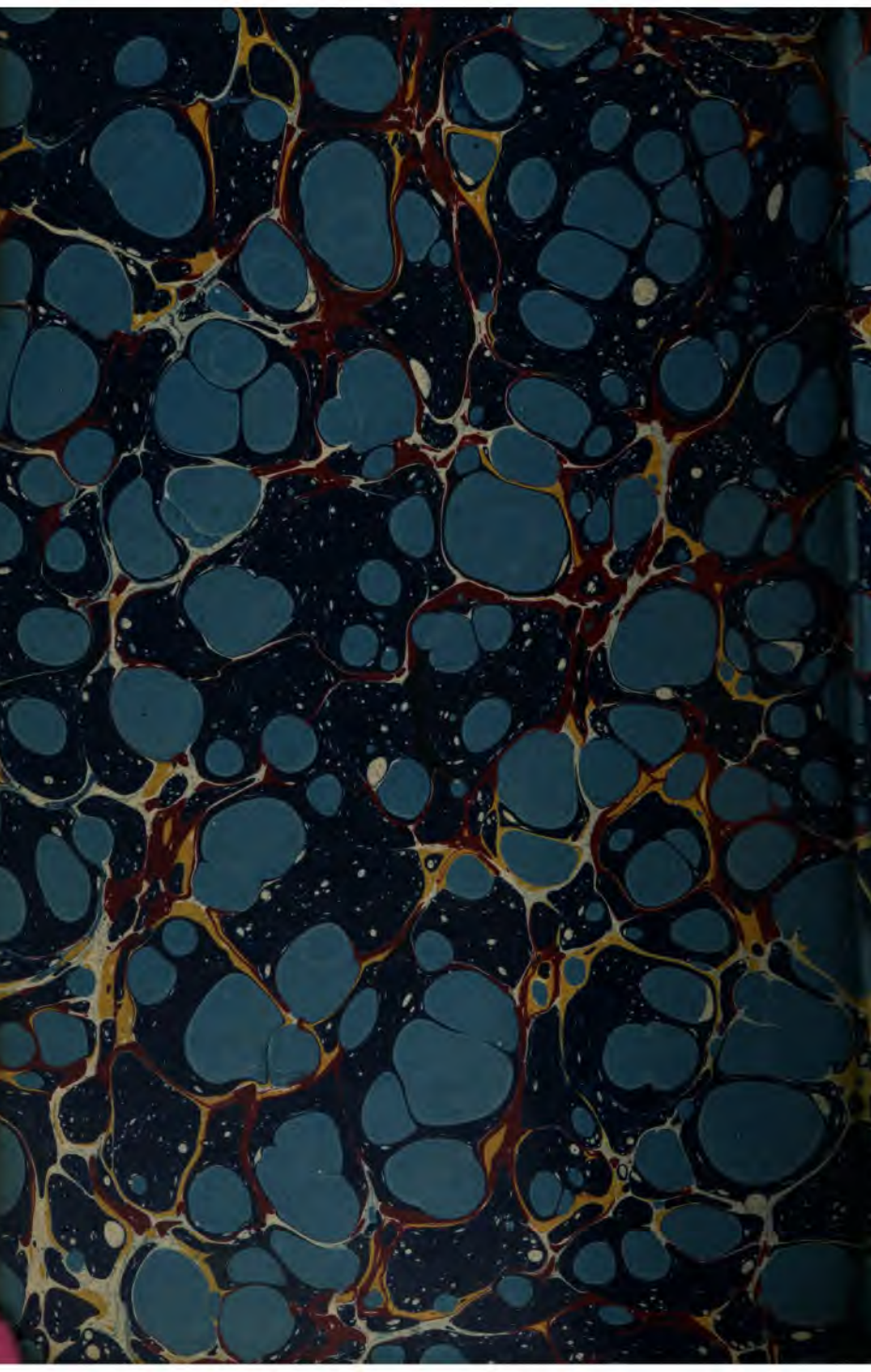

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